GRAD

DS
523.4
.T35
T47
2009

i Lands and Thailand

Community and State in Southeast Asia

edited by Andrew Walker

ASIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

Southeast Asia Publications Series

TAI LANDS AND THAILAND

Community and State in Southeast Asia

ASIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA
Southeast Asia Publications Series

Since 1979 the Southeast Asia Publications Series (SEAPS) has brought some of the best of Australian scholarship on Southeast Asia to an international readership. It seeks to publish leading-edge research by both young and established scholars on the countries and peoples of Southeast Asia across all disciplines of the humanities and social sciences with particular encouragement to interdisciplinary and comparative research.

SEAPS is now published for the Asian Studies Association of Australia by NUS Press, a unit of the National University of Singapore, in alliance with the University of Hawaii Press in North America and the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) [non-Indonesia titles] and the KITLV Press [Indonesia titles] in Europe.

Editorial Board

Professor Howard Dick (University of Melbourne) (Editor)

Professor Barbara Andaya (University of Hawaii and University of Hawaii Press)
Professor Colin Brown (Curtin University of Technology)
Associate Professor John Butcher (Griffith University)
Professor Emeritus David Chandler (Monash University)
Associate Professor Helen Creese (University of Queensland)
Dr Robert Cribb (Australian National University)
Dr Jane Drakard (Monash University)
Dr Greg Fealy (Australian National University)
Professor Robert Elson (University of Queensland)
Professor Barbara Hatley (University of Tasmania)
Professor Kevin Hewison (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)
Professor Virginia Hooker (Australian National University)
Professor Rey Ileto (National University of Singapore)
Gerald Jackson (NIAS - Nordic Institute of Asian Studies)
Associate Professor Paul Kratoska (NUS Press, National University of Singapore)
Professor Tim Lindsey (University of Melbourne)
Professor Andrew MacIntyre (Australian National University)
Emeritus Professor Campbell Macknight (Australian National University)
Professor Anthony Milner (Australian National University)
Dr Harry Poeze (Director, KITLV Press, Leiden)
Professor Anthony Reid (National University of Singapore)
Associate Professor Craig Reynolds (Australian National University)
Professor Merle Ricklefs (National University of Singapore)
Professor Kathryn Robinson (Australian National University)
Dr Mina Roces (University of New South Wales)
Professor Krishna Sen (Curtin University of Technology)
Associate Professor Maila Stivens (University of Melbourne)
Dr Philip Taylor (Australian National University)
Professor Carl Thayer (University of New South Wales, ADFA)
Professor Adrian Vickers (University of Sydney)

Website: http://iceaps.anu.edu.au/asaa_publications/southeast_asia.html

TAI LANDS AND THAILAND

Community and State in Southeast Asia

Edited by

Andrew Walker

Asian Studies Association of Australia
in association with
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I PRESS
HONOLULU

First published by:

NUS Press
National University of Singapore
AS3-01-02, 3 Arts Link
Singapore 117569

Published in North America by:

University of Hawai'i Press
2840 Kolowalu Street
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96822
www.uhpress.hawaii.edu

© 2009 NUS Press

All rights reserved. This book, or parts thereof, may not be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented, without written permission from the Publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Tai lands and Thailand: community and state in Southeast Asia / edited by Andrew Walker.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-8248-3359-6 (pbk.: alk. paper)

1. Tai (Southeast Asian people)—Economic conditions. 2. Tai (Southeast Asian people)—Social conditions. 3. Tai (Southeast Asian people)—Politics and government. 4. Subsistence economy—Southeast Asia. 5. Capitalism—Southeast Asia. 6. Community life—Southeast Asia. 7. Southeast Asia—Economic conditions. 8. Southeast Asia—Politics and government. I. Walker, Andrew, 1961–

DS523.4.T35T47 2009
305.895'911 — dc22
2008038197

Cover: New Year offerings presented to a senior government official in northern Thailand. Photo by Andrew Walker.

Printed in Singapore

Contents

List of Figures vii

Chapter 1 Modern Tai Community
Andrew Walker 1

Part I Critical Engagements

Chapter 2 The Origins of Community in the Thai Discourse of Global Governance
Craig J. Reynolds 27

Chapter 3 Building Modern Communities in Capitalist Thailand
James Haughton 44

Chapter 4 Tai Community and Thai Border Subversions
Nicholas Farrelly 67

Part II Local Networks

Chapter 5 The Spirit of Community: Puta Belief and Communal Sentiments in Southern Laos
Holly High 89

Chapter 6 The Festival, the Abbot and the Son of the Buddha
Andrew Walker 113

Part III Negotiated States

Chapter 7 Living within the State: A Dormitory Community in Central Laos
Sarinda Singh 141

Chapter 8 The Mechanics of Belonging: Regional Networks and Italian Scooters from Post-Revolutionary Laos
Warren Mayes 166

Chapter 9 Re-Configuring Belonging in Post-Socialist Xishuangbanna, China
Antonella Diana 192

Chapter 10 Tai Community on the Move
Andrew Walker 214

Notes 221

Bibliography 231

Contributors 249

Index 251

List of Figures

Figure 1.1	Mainland Southeast Asia, with locations of the case studies examined in this book	2
Figure 3.1	A rice store constructed with NGO funds	48
Figure 3.2	A village handicraft trade show in an upmarket Bangkok hotel	51
Figure 4.1	Two generations of a family in the Shan State that have returned from work in Thailand	82
Figure 4.2	A Thai soldier watching the Thailand-Burma border in Chiang Mai Province	84
Figure 5.1	Four bamboo skewers arranged in a banana leaf to be offered to the puta	95
Figure 5.2	The shrine to the puta	97
Figure 5.3	Mae Khancay's household	99
Figure 5.4	Mae Khancay's skewer	101
Figure 5.5	Mae Kiaw's household	102
Figure 5.6	Mae Foy's household	103
Figure 5.7	Mae Kham's household	106
Figure 5.8	Mae Kham's household through space and time	106
Figure 6.1	Reciting the prayer of invitation to Upakhut	114
Figure 6.2	The village maidens preparing the "rice that has never suffered"	123
Figure 7.1	The Nakai forestry dormitory	143
Figure 7.2	Floor plan of the forestry dormitory in Nakai	146

Figure 7.3 The main road leading to Nakai from the lowlands 153

Figure 8.1 A Vespa and sidecar in Vientiane on Lane Xang Avenue 168

Figure 8.2 Laos and its neighbours, showing the scooter rally routes 178

Figure 8.3 Members of the Vientiane Scooter Club reach the Chinese border near Boten 180

Figure 8.4 One of the visiting Lambretta riders from Thailand 181

Figure 9.1 Xiao Hong and Yi Kaeo on their way to the second wedding ceremony 193

Figure 9.2 Mengman primary school's exhortations to its young Chinese citizens 199

1

Modern Tai Community

Andrew Walker

This book provides a new approach to the study of community in the Tai world of mainland Southeast Asia.

Much of the current ethnographic work in the Tai world is constrained by a conceptual framework that associates community with tradition, locality and subsistence economy. This traditional community is commonly portrayed as being undermined by the modern forces of state incorporation, market penetration, globalisation and population mobility.

In this volume, we take a very different view. We challenge the widely held view that community is a traditional social form that is undermined by modernity. Using case studies from Thailand, Laos, Burma and China, we explore the active creation of 'modern community' in contexts of economic and political transformation.[1] Our aim is to liberate community from its stereotypical association with traditional village solidarity and to demonstrate that communal sentiments of belonging retain their salience in the modern world of occupational mobility, globalised consumerism and national development.

Our focus is on the Tai world, made up of the various peoples who speak Tai languages. The largest groups are the Thai of Thailand, the Lao of Laos, the Shan of Burma and the Dai of southern China. Of course, each of these categories is problematic; they are all the modern products of historical circumstance rather than being natural or self-evident ethnic groups. There are certainly linguistic and cultural similarities that justify the shared label 'Tai' but this must be treated as a preliminary delineation of a field of interest without rushing to

Figure 1.1 Mainland Southeast Asia, with locations of the case studies examined in this book (numbers refer to the chapters).

assumptions about a common identity or a sense of shared history. Indeed, our primary goal is to critically examine contemporary notions of belonging in this Tai world.

The Tai world is a particularly interesting place to examine ideas about community. For some, the Tai world itself is a transborder community of historical linkages, cultural commonality and shared identity. As Cold War political tensions in the region have declined and as opportunities for cross-border contact have proliferated, the cultural template of 'Tai-ness' has been promoted as a cultural foundation for regional integration in a globalising world. Advocates of modern Tai integration argue that a culturally authentic community of transborder belonging has persisted despite the disruptions of colonialism, state-building and warfare. One of the elements of this revitalised cultural commonality in the Tai world is the form of the local community itself. Many recent observers of the Tai world have made reference to a particular type of (rural) community that is seen as representing authentic Tai-ness: "the village community is the basis for the economy and culture of the Tai including the Thai of Thailand" (quoted in Farrelly, 2003: 33). Those constructing this modern imagery of traditional community often look across borders to find versions of it that are more in keeping with their vision of authentic Tai-ness.

In the modern Tai world, the idea of local community is mobilised in projects of state building, economic development and grassroots empowerment. In Thailand, during the 1990s there was a persistent campaign by non-government organisations (NGOs), academics and public intellectuals to develop a policy framework that was more sympathetic to community-based approaches to development and natural resource management. This culminated in a much-cited provision of the former constitution which granted "persons so assembling as to be an original local community ... rights in the management, maintenance, care and use of benefits from natural resources and the environment in a balanced and sustainable manner" (Government of Thailand, 1997).[2] Exactly what is meant by an "original local community" is not completely clear, but it conveys a strong sense of longstanding residence, a predominantly local focus and the persistence of what are seen as traditional practices. This particular constitutional provision was often cited as adding high-level legal legitimacy to the strengthening of communal resource management institutions. Across the Mekong River in Laos, community has an even more prominent position in public discourse. In the national campaign of poverty eradication — driven to

a significant extent by international development agencies — the village community is the key site of implementation and resource mobilisation. As High (2005: 69) writes, these local communities are seen as being the site of poverty: "the causes of poverty are to be found there, and it is through communal action within the village that poverty is to be addressed." And at a national level in Laos, one of the reactions of the modern state to the impact of globalisation has been an appeal to traditional symbols of communal attachment "to create a national identity that is distinct from those of neighbouring states" (Rehbein, 2007: 79).

One of our key aims, then, is to document some of the ways the idea of community is deployed in academic analysis, government policy and NGO advocacy throughout this region. However, we intend to go beyond documentation in two ways. First, the book explores the usefulness of community as an analytical concept — we are contributing to the long sociological tradition of critical reflection on the nature of community. As in other contexts, one of the key themes of critical reflection is the usefulness of the commonly assumed distinction between community and modernity. Our second strand of critical engagement is with the strategic or political use of community in the Tai world. It is often argued that the importance of community lies not in its analytical precision but in its ability to provide a basis for various forms of empowerment, political mobilisation and economic development. We document these strategic uses of community in a number of contexts but we also argue that the strategic benefits of community cannot be taken for granted. Community is a highly malleable notion and it can also contribute to marginalisation, disempowerment and bureaucratic incorporation.

A new orientation to community in the Tai world emerges from this critical discussion. The term 'modern Tai community' is an explicit statement of the view that there is no necessary tension between community and modernity. Community is symbolically and practically constructed in new political and economic contexts. This does not mean that familiar ideas of village community should be abandoned, but it does suggest that the experience of community by people living in villages — or anywhere else — is not inevitable, natural or all-embracing but subject to diverse processes of social and symbolic construction. The idea of modern Tai community also extends the idea of community well beyond its stereotypical village setting to include, for example, senses of belonging based on spatially dispersed networks,

common identification with key commodities, ephemeral alliances around development projects and forms of bureaucratic organisation. Modern Tai community extracts community from its normative and nostalgic embeddings in tradition and presents it as one problematic dimension of sociality in the modern world.[3]

TRADITIONAL TAI COMMUNITY

For many commentators, the traditional Tai community is a form of 'total community' in which diverse economic, social, cultural, political and environmental elements are subjected to the normative force of community regulation (Delanty, 2003: 21–5). This imagery of total community is built around the rural Tai village in which economic activities are primarily oriented to subsistence production (Chatthip, 1999). Production of rice for local consumption is seen as underpinning local economy and sociality. Rice production is supplemented by mushrooms and wild vegetables from the surrounding forests and from the abundant fish in the streams and paddy fields. In these subsistence-oriented communities housing is made from timber, bamboo and grass, while farm tools are fashioned from readily available local products. Of course, it is well recognised that some essential items, such as iron and salt, may have been obtained through local and long-distance trading relations, but these external economic ties are seen as being peripheral to local systems of production (Ireson, 1995). Similarly, aristocratic or mercantile elites may have had some interest in "skimming a surplus out of the villages" but they had little interest in transforming local production systems. The image is of a "radically dual economy" in which subsistence production within the community was relatively disconnected from the external forces of state extraction and mercantile transformation (Baker and Pasuk, 1999: 122).

These rural Tai villages are commonly portrayed as being built around the communal management of resources "ranging from the temple, the cemetery, the school, the irrigation system up to the forest itself". These resources are seen as the "heritage of the ancestors that the villagers have to protect and manage for the collective benefit according to agreed rules and traditions of the community" (Anan, 2001: 121). Most iconic in accounts of communal resources are the local irrigation systems that require considerable extra-household cooperation for construction, maintenance and operation. A study of village irrigation in Laos concludes that the "patterns of cooperation" provide for "effective and egalitarian management of common resources"

(Ireson, 1995: 555; see also Uraivan, 1995). Another iconic institution is reciprocal labour exchange in which farming households contribute labour to others to assist with important agricultural tasks such as rice planting and harvesting. Large labouring groups are said to create a communal style of sociality, equality and generosity that is absent in more individualistic production processes. Some also see these approaches to production as reflecting a long-standing emphasis on communal property arrangements. Anthropological accounts from many parts of the Tai world have proposed that rice fields were communally owned or subject to strict communal regulations, which prevented the dispersion of land to non-members (Pratuang, 1997: 132; Chatthip, 1999: 10; Tanabe, 1988: 6).

The traditional Tai community is also seen as naturally self-governing: "self rule is the ideal of villagers" writes Chatthip (1999: 10). He adds, "It is a blessing from the past which villagers long to retain." Authority is exercised by community elders, kinship groups and ritual leaders who draw on the moral force of local spirits. Disputes are resolved internally. Communities sought to maintain their independence from urban centres of power, often fleeing to more remote areas when the predations of central authority became excessive. According to Turton (1972: 242), "the princes were feared more than tigers and bears". Political independence was ritually expressed in local spirit cults that distinguished local forms of authority from the centralised authority of the chiefly elites. Those entering or leaving the village had to make appropriate representations to the village guardian spirit and during the annual offering to the spirit, villages were ritually closed, with passage in or out forbidden (Tanabe, 1988: 10). "Such practices demonstrated village autonomy and, more significantly, the collective feeling of antagonism directed both against adjacent village communities as well as against official intervention from the... authorities" (Tanabe, 1988: 10–11).

Subsistence production, communal resource management and self-government are often portrayed as underpinning an intimate relationship with the environment. Locally oriented economic systems prevented over-exploitation of natural resources, while local institutions provided a basis for the sound management of resources by those who were most directly dependent on them. Dependence on the local environment is said to have generated diverse forms of ecological knowledge and conservationist cultural practice. In recent discussions of Tai community, considerable emphasis is placed on various forms of

local wisdom (*phum panya*) that provide a basis for sustainable resource management. One account of northern Thai local wisdom describes the ways in which the subsistence production of the region's farmers is based on technologies and practices that "harmonise lifestyle with the natural environment". Forest product collection is governed by "local wisdom that comes from villagers' observation of nature and environmental cycles" (Ekawit, 2001: 21, 77). Other publications have documented the precepts, ritual prohibitions and taboos that reflect the sympathetic relationship between local Tai culture and the encompassing environment: "you should not cut down big trees. It is not good to make paddy-fields or gardens, or to build a house in those areas. If you live there, there will be no happiness" (Khomnet, Buntha and Silao, 1996: 49). Communal action taken to protect forested areas is often regarded as one of the important antecedents of the modern community forestry movement throughout the region (Walker, 2004). In these various ways the moral force of community is extended to incorporate the natural environment (Rose, 2000).

Of course, it is widely recognised that much of this has changed. Drawing on one of the classic tropes of Western social science, writers on the Tai world regularly lament the evolutionary transition from traditional community to the individualism and anomie of modern society. The key forces that have brought about the fragmentation of the total Tai community are the market and the state. With the emergence of cash-crop production and the undermining of local handicrafts by manufactured imports, rural households have come to depend on the market for a wide range of subsistence goods normally produced within the household. Consumer goods were often offered on credit by "shop keepers and merchant traders aspir[ing] to optimise market potential" (Uraivan et al., 1988: 101). Farmers were drawn into the production of cash crops so they could repay their debts and fund further purchases. The high costs of agricultural inputs and volatile market prices forced many further into debt and led ultimately to the loss of their land. Previously cooperative communities were divided into socio-economic classes with differential access to resources. Diverse forms of labour cooperation and networks of support collapsed as wage labour relations proliferated. As systems of communal regulation broke down, sustainable management of local resources came to be replaced by a free-for-all tragedy of the commons. And the rise of individualism was mirrored in spiritual orientations as communal rituals were increasingly replaced by ritual observances at a household level (Anan, 2001: 123).

The state is seen as playing a key role in this transformation. In what is often described as a process of "territorialisation" (Vandergeest, 1996), state extension of power has undermined local systems of communal resource management. States have seized forest land, often encouraging unsustainable resource exploitation by external commercial forces such as logging companies, forest-product traders and agribusinesses. Furthermore, states have promoted systems of individual land tenure at the expense of less legible communal arrangements. Political incorporation has created new forms of local leadership, marginalising the traditional leaders whose authority relied on a holistic mix of personal charisma, ritual legitimacy and the ability to offer protection. In many parts of the Tai world, state development initiatives have also encouraged the adoption of market-oriented economic strategies. State extension efforts, infrastructure construction and international trading agreements have facilitated the penetration of commercial agriculture into what were previously subsistence-oriented agricultural systems.

However, this picture of community destruction is not uniform. Some observers argue that many aspects of community culture still persist. Tai community persists in the more remote regions of Thailand and, in particular, in the peripheral regions of Laos, Burma and southern China where contact with the capitalist system has been brief (Chatthip and Pornpilai, 1998). A key thrust of recent anthropological scholarship in the Tai world has been to document the origins and persistence of Tai community in areas outside Thailand. This venture, which Yos (2001: 16) describes as "construct[ing] the distant past by studying the geographically distant" is most clearly represented by the Project on Tai Social and Cultural History led by Professor Chatthip Nartsupha. This project seeks to mobilise ethnographic and ethno-historical material from the region as a critique of the impact of modernity in the Thai heartland.

REVISIONIST VIEWS OF TRADITIONAL TAI COMMUNITY

These images of Tai community have generated significant critical commentary and debate. An important contribution was made by Bowie (1992) in her attempt to unravel "the myth of the subsistence economy". Bowie traces the creation of the imagery of self-sufficient rural communities in royalist, post-royalist and Marxist accounts from Thailand. Provocatively, she describes an "odd convergence between

conservative and progressive intellectuals" with the former seeking to romanticise the past in order to evade class tension and the latter glorifying the past in order to sharpen their critique of capitalism (Bowie, 1992: 819). Bowie (1992: 797) argues that these various accounts "have been virtually unanimous in their characterisation of the peasant economy as a subsistence economy", a paradigm that promotes an image of the Thai peasantry as "homogenous, egalitarian, self-sufficient, non-market and unchanging". To counter this view, she argues for the importance of trade in the premodern Thai rural economy, constructing an alternative vision of a rural economy that is based on "a complex division of labour, class stratification, dire poverty, a wide ranging trade network, and an unappreciated dynamism" (Bowie, 1992: 819). I have made a similar argument in response to the common view that rural Laos was characterised by a "natural economy" in which market exchange was peripheral, local production systems were relatively static and the focus of rural economic activity was on self-provisioning (Walker, 1999). Focusing on northern Laos, I argued that trade between rural and urban areas — particularly in rice and forest products — was a key feature of pre-colonial rural social relations and underpinned the survival of inland trading centres such as Luangphrabang. "A rudimentary system of political-spatial specialisation occurred where lowland settlements concentrated on handicrafts and trade, while the uplanders focused on agricultural production" (Walker, 1999: 39; see also Giersch, 2006; Masuhara, 2003; Hill, 1998; and Koizumi, 1992).

Of course, there is some risk in overstating this critique. Even the most ardent advocates of the self-sufficient Tai community recognise the existence of local and regional trading relations. As Evans (2008: 514) points out, "any serious consideration of the anthropological literature on the peasantry... would make it clear that peasants are part of larger political, cultural and economic networks". But it is also clear that much of the literature on the Tai peasantry not only plays down the importance of these external networks but often sees them as being antithetical to an authentic or traditional sense of Tai community. Critics may occasionally erect straw men of autarchy, but there is little doubt that there is a predominant concern in much of the literature on traditional Tai community with what Evans (2008: 514) refers to as a "high level of self provisioning" and, more importantly, that localised production (rather than exchange) is seen as the basis of local sociality. Overall, a preoccupation with self provisioning has drawn attention away from the extent to which external economic

relations shaped premodern settlement patterns, marriage practices, ritual networks, occupational specialisation, social differentiation and agricultural innovation.

A more fundamental critique of the imagery of the Tai community emerges from considering more contemporary developments. The work of a number of revisionist researchers suggests that the commonly cited distinction between traditional community and modern society is unsustainable. Community emerges as a thoroughly modern phenomenon, constructed in dialogue with both the state and the market.

Kemp's work (1987; 1989; 1991) on the "seductive mirage" of the Thai village is a good starting point. The argument presented by Kemp is that Thai villages are a quite recent product of the extension of state administrative action to local levels. He suggests that the village is a creation of the administrative reforms of the 1890s, which introduced a new form of territorial administration: "The changes in Siam marked the modernising elite's incorporation of an outsider's image and model of the village community into the new administrative structure and its subsequent imposition on the countryside" (Kemp, 1991: 313). According to Kemp, this fixed territorial organisation (in which the village was the primary unit) displaced previous forms of government based on multi-stranded and flexible linkages between people. In other words, the idea of discrete, bounded and distinct villages — which is the core image of the traditional Tai community — is a product of modern state incorporation. Kemp's argument applies better to the central plains of Thailand than, for example, the mountainous north, where there has long been a nucleated settlement pattern. Nevertheless, his critique does usefully highlight the role of state administration in generating sentiments and institutions of local belonging that are not necessarily an inevitable product of co-residence.

Reynolds (Chapter 2) explores more recent phases of this administrative consolidation. In his exploration of the genealogy of the Thai term for community (*chumchon*), he identifies the importance of the community development discourse adopted by sections of the Thai bureaucracy, especially during the influx of American aid money in the 1950s and 1960s. Reynolds points to the institutionalisation of community within the powerful Ministry of Interior through, for example, the creation of the Department of Community Development and the bureaucratically produced *Community Development Bulletin*. "In this sense," Reynolds writes, "community belongs to the history of the structuring of village society by the state". In relation to an even more

recent historical phase, Rigg (1994) shows how modern development initiatives have encouraged mobilisation along community lines. The international discourse of 'participation' has been crucial in this creation of community: "the state has not only created the 'village', but it has introduced policies to ferment and then cement a sense of village identity" (Rigg, 1994: 131). Often the only way in which local people can effectively engage with state development initiatives is by adopting the key symbols and institutional forms of local community.

The productive interplay between state and community points to the role of the community in modern forms of governance. Drawing inspiration from the work of Foucault, a number of writers have suggested that community embraces sets of meanings, institutions and norms through which state power is embedded in local practice (Herbert, 2005; Rose, 2000; Marsden and Murdoch, 1998; Agrawal, 2001a; 2001b). Agrawal's work on the "regulatory community" is a useful discussion of the ways in which forms of environmental governance ("environmentality") are achieved through local resource management institutions. As states seek to shed traditional regulatory functions, the community emerges as a key site for the enforcement of dispersed standards of responsible citizenship. In the Lao context, High (2005: 58–9) argues that many community development initiatives can be seen as a form of state-led "participatory corvée" based on "views of villages as stable, cooperative units, prone to group effort for the common good". The classic cultural trope of cooperation is used as a basis for the "extraction of labour, time and resources from rural residents towards state projects". With more than a little irony, High (2005: 69) notes that "the term for this extraction is 'participation'".

Nevertheless, it would be unfortunate if the role of the state in the creation of community was perceived in purely negative terms. There is a risk of reintroducing the modern-traditional distinction through a view that state-mobilised forms of community are necessarily more authoritarian and coercive than more authentic forms of local sociality. In many situations, local residents and state agents actively collaborate in the creation of modern community. In fact, many community contexts are characterised by the lack of a clear boundary between state officials and local residents. In Chapter 6, I describe the proliferation of local development projects which have become one of the key preoccupations of northern Thai village politics. These projects, such as the construction of a handicraft centre or the upgrading of an irrigation system, are sites of institutional elaboration where forms of community

organisation represent the blurred interface between state and locality. They are the sites where local residents, often under the legitimising banner of collective endeavour, participate in local projects of state-making. Another local perspective on the state's role in community formation is provided by Singh (Chapter 7) in her account of the "dormitory community" of state officials in central Laos. This important contribution places community firmly within a bureaucratic context, but in a way that highlights the ambiguities of state formation in a peripheral region. Singh's dormitory of marginal state officials can be seen as a state-created space of intense and intimate community where a proliferation of "transparent moments" renders formal and simplified statements of authority problematic.

So, the modern state can be seen as a participant in the formation of Tai community. But what about the modern capitalist market? As we have seen, accounts of Tai community typically point to the intrusive and disruptive effect of modern market relations. Of course there is nuance in these accounts that should not be overlooked. In some cases the community is seen as being complementary to the market: providing forms of livelihood support, social security and cultural resilience not catered for by the market. In other cases, the community is seen as a basis for strategic engagement with the market. This is one way of interpreting the "sufficiency economy" theory, promoted by Thailand's king, which emphasises the importance of "a firm foundation of self-reliance" prior to moving onto higher stages of economic development (UNDP, 2007: 28). These perspectives point to the potential for non-destructive relations between community and market, but community and market are still treated as fundamentally separate domains and there is little recognition of the productive role of commercialisation in actually constituting community.

However, there is good evidence that capitalism can be creative, rather than destructive, of community (Shigetomi, 1992). Exchange labour is often seen as a marker of Tai community and its decline is attributed to the proliferation of wage labour arrangements under the regime of capitalist agriculture. But this is an overly simplified narrative of community decline. In fact, growing pressure on local labour resources can lead to intensified labour-group cooperation. Local pressures on the work force arise from intensive schedules of cash-crop production combined with the diversion of young people to the urban labour force. In this labour-scarce context, exchange labour can become more prevalent than in the past — when it was mainly associated with

rice planting and harvesting — because of the need to meet strict agricultural production schedules set down by commodity buyers. These exchange labour groups can also provide a structural basis for the provision of credit and agricultural inputs. Agricultural brokers cultivate the solidarity of these groups — including hosting parties at various stages in the production cycle — to enhance productivity and reliability. For these commercial agents, groups provide a more manageable commercial environment, particularly in relation to enforcing the repayment of credit. Of course, more individualistic wage labour and contracting arrangements are also common, but these too are often culturally framed in the idioms of community: exchange labour, cooperation between kin, and helping out in times of peak labour demand.

Similar observations about the recent creation of community can also be made about cooperative irrigation systems that are common throughout the Tai world. In the past, these systems functioned mainly to provide supplementary water during the wet season, especially early in the season when abundant water was required for field preparation, and in mid-season when changing monsoonal influences often meant a lack of rainfall. The widespread market-led adoption of dry-season agriculture throughout the region over the past few decades has placed these systems under unprecedented pressure. They are now required to provide virtually the entire water supply to agricultural fields during the dry season. Given the low stream-flow that often prevails during the dry season, this requires a much higher level of local cooperative management involving the development of new community-based institutions for water sharing, dispute resolution, system maintenance and infrastructural improvement. In many cases, this amounts to a regulatory elaboration of communal management previously unknown. In some cases, it also encourages higher levels of cooperation in relation to land use, with cultivation consolidated in dry years on better-watered areas of land.

These observations focus on the relation between community and market-oriented production. But what about consumption? Here again there is evidence of the formation of new types of community based on the shared consumption of commodities. Part of the social life of commodities is that, through human networks of circulation and exchange, they become sites for the production of meaning and the generation of new forms of attachment. In a recent contribution, Rehbein (2007: 112–22) describes the proliferation of hybrid genres of popular music in Laos. This contemporary music has a strong

Western and Thai influence in style, melody and instrumentation but maintains a distinctly Lao orientation in the lyrics: "the language and content of these songs make it clear that these are *Lao* relationships" (Rehbein, 2007: 119). This combination of global and local influences in consumption patterns and forms of cultural expression — what Rehbein calls "glocalization" — contributes to new dimensions of belonging, particularly among upwardly mobile groups of entrepreneurs, government officials, aid workers and academics. According to Rehbein (2007: 86), these elite groups are now "defining their position within the global order, not within the nation".

This theme is taken up by Mayes (Chapter 8) who provides a fascinating account of a group of marginalised urban Lao men creating shared forms of transnational identity based on their membership of the Vientiane Vespa motor-scooter club. This is a form of belonging that is built around the ambiguous European-Asian origins of the Vespa in Laos and it is a form of belonging very different from the officially promoted 'imagined community' of the Lao state. While Rehbein emphasises the increasingly globalised community of the elite, Mayes shows that there are also forms of transnational identity accessible to more marginal segments of the Lao population. Diana's contribution (Chapter 9) also suggests the importance of consumption-based aspirations in strengthening some forms of belonging, while weakening others. For the Chinese Tai girls who are the focus of her study, the commercial impoverishment of the Lao markets across the border underlines their commitment to Chinese modernity. Common notions of a seemingly inevitable transborder Tai community are challenged by her account. The young women she describes seem more closely connected to the lure of livelihood mobility and conspicuous consumption represented by the globalised Chinese cities of Shanghai and Beijing than to the drab Lao townships just across the border. Being Tai is by no means irrelevant in their lives but, in contrast to the marginalised Vespa owners of Vientiane, a highly commodified version of ethnic minority 'Dai-ness' provides them with a niche within the Chinese national community.

THE STRATEGIC COMMUNITY

Revisionist views of Tai community open the way to a more creative exploration of the diverse relationships between forms of sociality, state formation and commercialisation.[4] They highlight the selectivity

of the reassuringly familiar narrative of community decline in the face of modernisation. Yet, selectivity may be not such a bad thing in some contexts, especially when community is deployed as a strategic, rather than analytical, concept in pursuit of political mobilisation and assertion of basic rights:

> Ethnographic accuracy is not the relevant criterion upon which such representations should be judged.... Their analysis may fail to convince or impress anthropologists, but this is presumably not their goal: simplified representations can be more effective than subtle ones, when deployed in a macro policy context (Li, 1996: 504).

Some may even see academic scrutiny of traditional representations of community as irresponsible, given that it threatens to undermine the claims for self-determination, resource control and political representation made by powerless and marginal people. Simplified concepts of community may indeed embrace mythical representations of village life but they may also provide a mythical charter for action in the contemporary resource struggles of late capitalism. Central to this 'strategic community' line of thinking is the view that community opens up a space for alternative representations of sociality, economy and culture. Simplified representations of community are seen as valuable in challenging and shifting dominant nationalistic, bureaucratic and commercial frames of reference and in opening up alternative spaces for mobilisation and resistance (Li, 1996; 2000; Liepins, 2000: 28).

In the Tai world, community has been widely used as a basis for political campaigns of advocacy and empowerment. In these campaigns, waged by NGOs and activist academics, the imagery of community is deployed as a critique of the adverse impacts of both the state and the market, and to provide a basis for grassroots mobilisation. There are a number of elements to this empowerment campaign. First, community is seen as providing an alternative to state power, both in the sense that it represents a domain of localised resistance against state incursion and in the broader sense that the transnational network — or community — of Tai communities subverts the modern territorial borders of the nation-state. This anti-state politics frames and motivates many discussions of Tai community: "we oppose the state, we oppose all states in the region, we want to build networks between all Tai communities" (quoted in Farrelly, 2003: 34). A more specific anti-state orientation is also signalled in the various community-based forms of development

that are promoted as an alternative to the predominant state emphasis on infrastructure, commercialisation and national integration.

A second and related element in the empowerment campaign is the advocacy of community rights. In an important contribution, Anan (2001: 5) argues that viewing community simply as a form of social capital through which people may cooperate and help each other is ineffective without adequate recognition of community rights. Exactly what is meant by community rights in the Tai world is not always clear. Much of the research in this area focuses on traditional regulations and ritual practices relating to the management of land, water and forest resources. Anan (2001: 133–4) distinguishes between "use rights", whereby resources such as land are temporarily allocated to community members for their productive activities, and "natural rights", whereby members of the community can access resources provided free by nature (such as mushrooms or ants' eggs) even if they are found on land where another member holds use rights. There is a strong historical dimension in many discussions of community rights, but contemporary ethnography is also drawn on to assert that communal institutions continue to form part of the repertoire of local capability. The community rights of the Tai of southern China have attracted much interest because they are seen as relatively successful in maintaining forms of communal organisation dating from the early stages of Tai state formation (Ratanaporn, 2000). The community rights campaign argues that legislation, which has privileged state property on the one hand and private property on the other, needs to recognise the status of longstanding processes of communal decision-making and forms of local knowledge that regulate resource use.

These dimensions of empowerment and political engagement are certainly important, and they highlight some of the politically productive uses of simplified images of Tai community. But can the strategic usefulness of community be taken for granted? One of the objectives of this book is to engage critically with this form of advocacy. While there is no denying that the concept of community may provide a liberating space of manoeuvre, consideration also needs to be given to the extent to which the contemporary language of community acts as a pathway, channelling diverse aspirations in pre-determined directions. Often, the language of community produces standard and highly simplified images around which appropriate claims to rights and benefits are framed. It is hard not to be disturbed by the extent to which economic development projects judged appropriate in community-based discourse

are normatively constrained by anti-commercial, anti-state and environmentalist stereotypes that do not necessarily express local aspirations. There is a real risk that the political uses of community normatively confine people within narrow frames of sociality and economy. As a political tool, community cannot escape from its various histories. As Delcore (2003) has argued, some popular images of community can be seen as a form of nostalgia by rural elites for times past when local authority structures were more immune from external influence.

The normative use of community in political campaigns lies at the heart of what I have referred to as the "limited legitimacy" of much community rights discourse (Walker, 2001b). In assessing community rights campaigns in northern Thailand, I have argued that while they make a "strong case for the legitimate presence of [minority] communities in upland catchments", they do this "on the basis of an idealised rural lifestyle based on subsistence-oriented, self-sufficient and non-commercial agricultural production" (Walker, 2001b: 155). This, no doubt, can be viewed as a strategic simplification but its erasure of a history of long-term commercial exchange and agricultural intensification runs the risk of undermining the claims of marginal farmers for scarce agricultural resources (such as dry-season irrigation water) and state development assistance. This limited legitimacy is underlined in the longstanding Thai campaign for community forest legislation. The bill, which has been a rallying point for community rights campaigners, renders agriculture illegal in community forest areas, despite the fact that a key objective of the campaign is to secure the tenure rights of farmers whose lands fall in forest reserve areas (Walker, 2004). The bill is based on an idealised notion of communal co-existence between villagers and the forest and, as such, creates a regulatory framework that is disconnected from primary livelihood concerns.

Haughton (Chapter 3) makes a useful contribution to rethinking how community may be deployed in contemporary empowerment campaigns. His chapter suggests that the distinction between analytical and strategic usefulness may be unproductive. He proposes that the approach commonly adopted in NGO local development projects is based on a misreading of Thai economic history and that this misreading contributes to practical outcomes quite different to what is intended. As an alternative to notions of community based in tradition, Haughton argues for contemporary "communities of common interest" based, for example, on achieving access to affordable capital or the shared experience of urban employment. A similar argument is also

made by Farrelly (Chapter 4) in relation to the Shan of the Thailand-Burma borderlands. The Shan are disadvantaged and marginalised in multiple ways, but this is often elided by a discourse of transborder Tai community motivated by an anti-modernist vision of subsistence economy and local community cohesion. "Living in contested, militarised or uncertain areas, the Shan cannot be divorced from their jumbled and speculative engagement with Southeast Asian modernity, conflict and economics" (Farrelly, Chapter 4).

SYMBOLS AND SOCIALITY

Our ethnographic objective in this volume is to consider the ways in which community is created and maintained, as one form of sociality, in diverse modern contexts. We aim to rescue the concept of community from its over-immersion in notions of tradition, subsistence livelihoods and local wisdom and instead promote it as a "term which continues to represent sets of practices, meanings and political possibilities for lay and academic activities alike" (Liepins, 2000: 28). Our choice of the term 'modern Tai community' is a deliberate attempt to subvert the assumption that modernity is opposed to community. The various essays in this volume explore the ways in which community is being creatively reworked in modern political and economic contexts. While the notion of modern Tai community may be disconcerting for those who seek to mobilise community against the predations of state and market, the view presented here is that engagement with contemporary aspirations, including aspirations for diverse forms of communal belonging, provides a much sounder basis for empowerment.

What might the dimensions of this modern Tai community be? A useful starting point is the important book on the symbolic construction of community by Anthony Cohen (1985). Cohen moves away from debates about the structural features of community to focus on its symbolic construction. He makes two main points. First, community is imagined, not just at the national scale as famously argued by Anderson (1991), but at the local scale of face-to-face interaction. Cohen rejects naïve assumptions about the simplicity of face-to-face interaction and argues that people involved in direct sociality require symbols that provide a basis for common orientation. These shared symbols are socially orienting and serve to define social boundaries, marking out the community of 'us' from 'them'. Cohen's second important insight is that these shared symbols of community are effective because they

are vague. Unelaborated symbols are able to accommodate a diversity of meanings that more elaborated or specific symbols could not. In this important sense, symbols of community are aggregating rather than integrating. Cohen (1985: 21) illustrates this nicely:

> A courting couple may exchange an expression of sentiment:
>
> 'I love you!'
>
> '*I* love *you*!'
>
> without feeling the need to engage in a lengthy and complicated disquisition on the meaning of the word 'love'. Yet it is, of course, a word which masks an extremely complex idea. So complex is it that were our two lovers to attempt to explain their meanings precisely they might well find themselves engaged in fierce argument. Symbols are effective because they are imprecise ... transform[ing] the reality of difference into the appearance of similarity.

Anthony Cohen's argument provides important insight into discussions of community in the Tai world. In particular, from Cohen's perspective, cultural and social phenomena that are often promoted as being key elements of Tai community can be seen as aggregating symbols. Exchange labour, for example, can be understood as a simplified symbolic form that embraces diverse labour recruitment arrangements. Rather than it comprising a central structural component of Tai economy, the various linguistic and cultural markers of exchange labour amount to an ideological statement about a morally valued domain of collective endeavour. Discussions about the details of labour recruitment often lead to arguments but general appeals to cooperation and mutual help can contribute to a broader sense of common purpose. Similarly, 'community forest' is a sufficiently vague notion that it can, in some contexts, symbolically unify people with diverse approaches to forest use and management. Rather than representing a specific institutional form, livelihood orientation or ecological zone, community forest can be understood as a symbol that enables diverse local and non-local actors to express a common commitment to vaguely defined environmental objectives. Given the diversity of meanings conveyed by these symbolic components of community, it may well be unrealistic to expect them to carry the administrative weight that NGOs, development workers and state agencies often place upon them: "Community thus exists as a false floor, ready to collapse when laden with excessive political expectations" (Herbert, 2005: 853). It is a mistake to assume

that symbolic forms that are emblematic of community are, in fact, structural components of it.

One of the key benefits of recognising the symbolic construction of community is that it detaches community from its embeddedness in locality. Sentiments of belonging and common purpose can be constructed around mobile, spatially dispersed and even de-territorialised symbols, what Liepens (2000) calls "stretched-out communities". Of course, this is not to argue that locality is unimportant, as the symbolism of neighbourhood, village, birthplace and landscape are regularly drawn on in creating, and manipulating, sentiments of common attachment. However, shared attachments to locality need not represent a uniformity of meaning, value or agreed-upon rights. Village, home, and kin are vague symbols that embrace diverse local interpretations and these interpretations are shot through with the symbolic influence of other extra-local referents of belonging.

Nevertheless, there are risks in overstating the symbolic dimensions of community. Some writers have argued that Cohen's primary emphasis on the symbolic construction of community draws attention away from its social dimensions. Amit (2002b), for example, is the editor of a collection on "realizing community" in which community is not so much imagined through symbols as realised through patterns of day-to-day interaction and communication. *Realizing Community* argues that the maintenance of community is difficult in the absence of direct interpersonal relationships. This is a view that sees community as emerging out of ongoing processes of communicative action rather than residing in orientating symbols (Delanty, 2003: Chapter 6). Of particular interest is Amit's scepticism about accounts of diasporic community in which community becomes a virtual phenomenon that relies on categorical similarity and is stripped of any meaningful social content. Others have argued that notions of de-territorialised community, including Internet-based communities, lack a sense of engaged and embedded commitment to the welfare of others (Willson, 1997; Calhoun, 1991; but see Wilson and Peterson, 2002). In these virtual or diasporic communities, membership of broad categories and affiliation to shared symbols replaces commitment to fellow community members, resulting in a thin sense of commonality that lacks the real-world political commitment which some see as inherent to meaningful community experience. As Calhoun (1991: 107) has argued, "there is a great deal of difference between the social groups formed out of direct relationships among their members ... and social categories defined by

common cultural or other external attributes of their members and not necessarily linked by any dense, multiplex, or systematic web of interpersonal connections".

This debate has important implications for the Tai world, where there has been considerable interest in forms of transnational community. For many commentators, cross-border cultural commonalities provide a basis for a sense of transnational Tai community that challenges the bounded imagined communities of the region's nation-states. A transnational Tai community (and even family) is asserted on the basis of linguistic similarities, historical connections and similarity in cultural practice. Some recent Thai scholarship has suggested that these historical connections are now being enlivened by the modern circulation of commodities across national borders, creating a "culture of brotherhood" informed, in part, by the desirable status of goods produced in Thailand (Aranya, 2007: 16; see also Wasan, 2005). But how viable is this transnational community in the absence of meaningful social interaction? Circulation of music, videos and publications (Davis, 2003; Wasan, 2005), participation in regionally oriented religious festivals (P. Cohen, 2000a; 2001) and involvement in cross-border commerce and consumption (Walker, 1999; Aranya, 2007) may well contribute to a sense of connection between Dai, Lao, Shan and Thai, but questions need to be asked about the strength of this regional Tai community in the context of numerous alternative frames of belonging and day-to-day livelihood preoccupations. To some extent, the transnational Tai community is a compelling construction only to the extent that it is abstracted from more quotidian and socially embedded concerns. This abstraction can result in a culturalist orientation in which a hollowed-out politics of identity displaces a more grounded engagement with livelihood struggles and aspirations. So, while a symbolic approach can help liberate community from a narrowly defined preoccupation with the local, close attention needs to be given to the ways in which symbols gain salience through forms of day-to-day social interaction (Diana, Chapter 9).

Another reservation about Anthony Cohen's work arises from his emphasis on the boundary of community. For Cohen, symbols of community demarcate 'us' from 'them'. In this formulation the symbolic emphasis on the boundary is more important than the cultural content that lies within it — a position clearly influenced by Barth (1969). Few would disagree that community can sometimes involve drawing sharp distinctions between inside and outside. The clear demarcation and

enforcement of village boundaries during important Tai rituals is one obvious enactment of this symbolic boundary. Yet it is also evident that sentiments of community often focus on cultural and social components that do not necessarily serve a boundary-marking function. Community is often constructed around important resources or assets, a sense of shared enterprise, forms of interpersonal communication and, in some cases, the immediacy of physical assembly. Here the emphasis is on the core cultural content of community, rather than on the symbolically marked boundary (Gray, 2002).

In fact, rather than marking boundaries, key components of community often point to linkages between 'inside' and 'outside'. In the Tai world, the Buddhist temple is a good example. Of course, the temple can be used as a basis of differentiation from other communities — "our temple is more beautiful" or "our monks are more virtuous" — but the temple is also the focus of an extensive network of relationships with other places. The temple is a core institution of local community but its grandeur and spiritual potency is based on networks of relationships that are reproduced through festivals and elaborate institutions of inter-temple reciprocity (Walker, Chapter 6). Other forms of community based on shared orientations to commodities or lifestyles are not necessarily informed by a desire to mark boundaries but by desire to participate in a cosmopolitan world of connections.

ELEMENTS OF MODERN TAI COMMUNITY

In the chapters that follow, the symbolic and social construction of community is explored in three different ways. The first part, *Critical Engagements*, examines the development of the Thai concept of *chumchon* (community) and its application in contexts of national development, local empowerment and regional scholarship. In these various accounts, the common imagery of Tai community can be seen as a form of contemporary symbolic simplification. The selective and simplified imagery of traditional communal livelihood has been sufficiently vague and alluring to encourage widespread agreement and desire. As the chapters demonstrate, its symbolic referents lie in rural areas, but it is hard to escape the sense that the imagery is most compelling for its activist and academic advocates who live in urban Thailand. For these advocates, traditional Tai community does appear to function as a boundary-marking symbol — it sets them off from what they see as an undesirable mainstream preoccupation with national integration, economic development and rampant consumerism.

A rather different perspective on local community emerges in the following part, *Local Networks*. These two chapters focus on the dynamics of "doing community" — to use High's perceptively inelegant term — in local ritual contexts. While spirit propitiation and Buddhist ceremony are often associated with stereotypical images of total Tai community, these chapters propose that the forms of community created are partial, personal, idiosyncratic and often extra-local in orientation. Most importantly, they demonstrate that imaginings of community gain traction when they are embedded in social action. However, this embedding also challenges the efficacy of communal symbols. As symbols are refracted by their day-to-day entanglements, clear distinctions between private and public domains collapse, symbolic inclusiveness is replaced by more ephemeral alliances and village solidarity disaggregates into unbounded networks of personalised practice. Recognising this complexity does not eliminate the importance of senses of belonging but it does encourage greater attention to ongoing projects of community creation. Thus, community comes to be seen as a work in progress.

The third part, *Negotiated States*, places community within a different contextual frame. Here we see community being created as a result of dialogue with state power. In some cases this can be interpreted within a familiar framework of resistance, whereby marginalised groups seek forms of belonging that are denied them in the official imagery of the nation-state. In other cases, however, there is a more nuanced engagement with state power and its modernist aspirations. State visions of national integration and economic development are certainly not compelling in all contexts, but they often intersect creatively with individual aspirations for prosperity, education, mobility and security. New modes of communal belonging are formed at these modern intersections between official policy and personal orientation.

Part I
Critical Engagements

2

The Origins of Community in the Thai Discourse of Global Governance

Craig J. Reynolds

'Community' is now omnipresent in the vocabulary of modernisation and development. International financial institutions such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank try to influence how the term is to be used because they cherish community as one of the targets of aid and financial assistance. In movements that espouse community as a moral ideal, the word has cachet for the right and the centre, notwithstanding the strong leftist and anarchist associations via 'commune' and 'communist', which one might think would discredit the moral ideal for some people. In an effort to displace the logics of development, 'community economy' has lately been championed as a post-development concept for its emphasis on relationships and as an ethical and politically progressive space.

The term 'community' is notoriously slippery to define, partly because of the heavy investment that both international financial institutions as well as NGOs have in the efficacy of its meanings. The term has almost too much significance. "Trying to study community", says one social scientist, "is like trying to scoop up jello with your fingers. You can get hold of some, but there's always more slipping away from you" (Effrat, 1974: 1). For all its amorphous, illusory and elusive qualities, community continues to be valorised for its moral, spiritual, holistic and utopian characteristics (Reynolds, 2002: Chapter 13). Its powers to

bind are reflected in its use in English to translate the Arabic *ummah*, the community of all those who profess Islam (Hooker, 2004: 3). By the time the Prophet died in 632, the ummah was already seen as a new "supertribe" that could transcend differences and unite Muslims, Pagans and Jews (Armstrong, 2001: 5–12). Community is an empowering word, even as it is exploited or manipulated by its natural enemies. Dare I say it is a 'nice' word, a friendly word? It is not a critical word, and rarely does it have any critics.

I was first drawn to the word while working on the historical antecedents of the Thai response to the Asian financial crisis of 1997, when the value of the Thai baht plummeted, investors lost billions and the economy was catapulted into recession. I was intrigued by the multifarious uses of local knowledge or 'native wisdom' (*phum panya*) as Thai public intellectuals prefer to translate it. Although these words were already well-known and actively deployed long before 1997 to debate the politics of the environment and resource management, they were given new currency in the aftermath of the financial crisis as globalisation and the country's exposure to international markets came under scrutiny. Thailand's most influential public intellectual, the king, gave his birthday speech on 5 December 1997 in which he warned that people were living beyond their means. They should practise an 'economics of enough-ness', or 'the sufficiency economy', as it is popularly known (*setthakit phor phiang*).[1] The king's message, which harked back to an earlier age when local economies were supposedly simpler and self-sufficient, was that people should be satisfied with what they needed and not consume unnecessarily or invest irresponsibly. This stern admonition from the greatest moral authority in the land further boosted the fortunes of community, particularly in the sense of self-reliant community.

GENEALOGIES

In 'community' the most hallowed tenets of Marxian thought — the commune and the communist utopia — meet the structural and systemic tendencies of postwar American social science. Marxism and American social science, particularly as it became a servant of development theory, were influential in propelling community into studies of the developing world. Thailand was a strategic target for these studies after World War II.

In the *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1891), Engels delved into a comparative study of early European family life to find communal or shared property and agricultural labour at the basis of early social life, and he saw village community as rooted in family community (Engels, 1972). Engels doubtless drew on Marx's extended discussion in *Grundrisse* (Marx, 1973: 472–501) about the relationship between human settlement, the commune, labour, and property in the age of primitive accumulation. But commune or community in the Marxian narrative is merely an early stage of human social life, to be transformed by the economic forces of later modes of production. It is not an ideal form of social life to which human beings can aspire, in the Marxian perspective, because it is an archaic form of social life. Yet communes exist in many societies. The Russian thinker N.G. Chernyshevskii (1828–89) imagined village communes as the basis of a socialism that would emerge following a peasants' revolution in the nineteenth century (Suzuki, 2003: 88–90). Communal living had a distinguished history in nineteenth-century America and returned with a vengeance in the counter-culture movements of the 1960s and early 1970s, by which time it was estimated that there were between 2,000 and 3,000 communes in the USA (Poplin, 1979: 60).

The concept of community grew in the 1970s from a number of directions, most notably from the rediscovery of the work of Ferdinand Tönnies, who associated community with "intrinsic and non-logical values" (Tönnies, 1887). Tönnies' distinction between *Gemeinschaft*, referring to "social situations of intimate relationships in which social status is ascribed, roles are diffuse, and styles of doing things are traditional", and its opposite, *Gesellschaft*, "social situations of large-scale impersonal relationships", cast a long shadow over sociology (Effrat, 1974: 28). Gemeinschaft evoked "solidary, total, natural", whereas Gesellschaft pointed to "solitary, partial, contrived" (Tilly, 1974: 210). The same distinction holds in Russian, where community (*obshchina*) contains the root *obshch-*, meaning 'common property' or 'to hold in common'. Russian dictionaries have remained faithful to Marx's earliest social formation, the primitive commune, by preserving the notion of community as an ancient social structure. As we shall see, the modern Thai term for community has also been invested with solidarity and authenticity.

The notion of community encapsulating systems of inter-connected and complementary relationships can also be traced through the work of Robert Redfield published between 1947 and 1960. Jeremy Kemp,

an anthropologist who has written several critical studies of social scientific approaches to the study of Thailand, neatly summarises the tendencies of this literature. Community study, he says, was in keeping with functionalist fashions of the day, in that it "presented a rather static, corporatist image. Furthermore there was a trend towards an undue emphasis on order and, if not on actual cohesion, on the absence of divisions and conflict" (Kemp, 1987: 5–6). A lot of this social scientific literature tried to single out the distinctive features of community as opposed to other social units. But often what emerged was a primordial, timeless, traditional unit of rural organisation whose basic assumptions went unquestioned (Kemp, 1996: 45).

Typical in the sociological literature is work by Dennis Poplin, who contrasts "moral community" with "mass society", a distinction that derives from Gemeinschaft versus Gesellschaft. Individuals in communities feel a sense of identity and unity with their group; they feel a sense of involvement and wholeness; they feel enmeshed in a tight-knit web of meaningful relationships (Poplin, 1979: 5). Elsewhere, Poplin singles out what he calls the psychocultural dimension of the term while recognising that many sociologists would prefer to keep the term squarely within a territorial definition (Poplin, 1979: 18–19). Here Poplin, like other key writers on community such as Anthony Cohen (1985), recognises an othering aspect to community, an inclusive/exclusive fencing off of outsiders by community members and the feeling of 'us' versus 'them'. This is certainly one of the penumbra of meanings that travelled with community as it entered the Thai language, a meaning that has been sharpened by the response to the 1997 financial crisis and perceived assaults on Thai sovereignty.

The Thai word used to refer to the concept of community is *chumchon*, and it has a history that is both discontinuous and very recent. Although it is definitely a word with a past, it does not appear in the nineteenth-century Thai-Thai dictionary of the American missionary D.B. Bradley of the early 1870s, nor is there an entry for *chumchon* in the comprehensive, if overly erudite, McFarland Thai-English dictionary of 1944 (McFarland, 1944). A Thai-Thai dictionary published as recently as 1950 also has no entry for *chumchon*. Certainly *chumchon* gained currency only in the postwar period.

The first term (*chum*) literally means "to swarm"; the second (*chon*) means "living beings, creatures", according to McFarland (1944), but derives ultimately from the Pali-Sanskrit term *jana* of similar meaning. Many of the Pali-Sanskrit forms sprinkled throughout the Thai language

belong to the vocabulary of government, administration or religion, but some very common words that have been in the language for centuries also have Pali-Sanskrit pedigrees despite their ordinariness. Separately the terms *chum* and *chon* are very old. Both, for example, appear in the lexicon drawn from the Three Seals Law Code of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries compiled by Japanese and Thai scholars, but they appear separately. The terms apparently became fused for the first time only after World War II. Literally, then, the Thai terms mean something like 'the coming together of people'. *Chumchon* does not have the resonances of shared property or mutual assistance that the English word with its European pedigree possesses. Moreover, while *chumchon* can apply to both urban and rural communities, it is in relation to the countryside, villages, and villagers that the term became attached. Sometimes 'village' is attached to community to reinforce the rural dimension (*chumchon muban*).

Was this neologism the work of the royal wordsmith, Prince Wan, who lists *chumchon* in a revised lexicon of 1967 as one of the words he coined himself, possibly as early as 1934?[2] As an aristocrat, Prince Wan believed in the power of the elite by birthright to influence language. For him, the very act of translation was "to put [the word] into circulation with a stamp of authority" (Narathipphongpraphan, 2001: 107). At the same time, he was a natural linguist for he also knew that the word would not catch on if the language did not adopt it. "Criticism is inevitable and coiners of words must be prepared to face critics", he declared with his customary courtliness. He credited the speakers of the language with the power to decide whether or not the word would stick and called that power "the sanction of the genius of the language". In the case of *chumchon*, the alliteration of palatals and nasals was agreeable to the Thai ear and helped ease the word into the language. Also, the Thai language loves doubled forms. In his various papers and memoirs, Prince Wan cheerfully admits his failure with some of his coinages that simply did not catch on. For a diplomat trained in law and who had not been subjected to the structural turn in modern linguistics and cultural studies, he possessed a very Sausserian perspective about the structure of language. Only the speakers of the language can really change the language; individuals, even high-born ones, can do little to effect language change.

Of special interest for the history of community in Thai language is the usage of *chumchon* by Thai socialists in the mid-1950s. Kulap Saipradit, a prolific political author, used *chumchon* to translate

'primitive commune' in his 1954 book, *The Origins of the Family and the Human Social System* (Kulap, 1954), which borrowed heavily from Engels and Henry Morgan. A few years later Jit Poumisak, arguably Thailand's most famous 'political poet', followed Kulap's use of *chumchon* for 'primitive commune' in his path-breaking *The Real Face of Thai Feudalism Today* (Reynolds, 1994). Yet *chumchon* was not firmly established as a translation for 'commune' even by 1957. Other socialist authors used *chomrom* or *chumnum*. The word was still in motion. At the same time as 'community' was breaking into the Thai language via Marxian sociology, Japanese scholars began to debate community via a similar route. Hisao Otsuka published *Basic Theory of Community* (in Japanese) in 1955 by exploiting an eclectic Weberian-Marxian sociology. Otsuka interpreted Marxian communities (Asiatic, Ancient, Germanic) as unilinear stages of development, a position that immediately came under heavy criticism, with Japanese scholars through the early 1980s debating whether commune/community was a product of Western colonialism (Kitahara, 1996: 74–5). This serious Japanese interest in the meaning of community was to have repercussions in Thai studies by the late 1990s as Thai economic historians and sociologists forged networks with Japanese scholars of a similar intellectual bent.

Chumchon entered the Thai bureaucratic lexicon just after the mid-century as American aid flooded into the country for development projects. In this sense, community belongs to the history of the structuring of village society by the state (Johnson, 2001). In the detailed if mind-numbing histories of Thai ministries that make it possible to track community (*chumchon*), we can see that the term at this stage meant a distinct administrative level with fixed boundaries, perhaps close to the village (*ban* or *muban*) that lay under the district level and had historically eluded the attentions of government (Anan, 2001: 111). As American aid increased in amount and strategic value, the Thai bureaucracy evolved to accommodate the aid, particularly in two ministries. For a decade from 1950, plans had been put forward for rural development in the gargantuan Ministry of Interior, which from ancient times to the present day has been the fief of the most powerful officials and politicians in the country. However, the plans were rejected each time because of budgetary constraints (Ministry of Interior, 1965: 256–8). Only when Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat came to power in 1958 — "he was interested in development rather than democracy", states the Ministry's history in an unguarded moment — did the money begin to flow for rural and community development.

In 1962 a reform of the bureaucracy saw the creation of a Department of Community Development. This measure was seen, at least by the American aid authorities, as a means of training village workers to serve "as information conduits downward for advice for technical ministry officials, and channels upward for village ideas" (Caldwell, 1974: 57).

'Community development' was important enough to inspire the launch in 1962 of the Community Development Bulletin (*Warasan Phatthana Chumchon*), an in-house publication of the Ministry of Interior. The Bulletin carried news of meetings, some chaired by Field Marshal Sarit himself, and projects concerning rural infrastructure, rural economy, education and health. By the end of the decade, however, the bulletin had deteriorated into a soft, eclectic publication filled with cooking recipes and miscellaneous pieces about tourism and democracy. Here, too, in May 1962 is evidence of a shift to *chumchon* as opposed to other words for community such as *thongthin*. The links with American aid policy and its preoccupation with counterinsurgency are also evident. In a report published in the May 1962 Bulletin, J. Sheldon Turner, identified as head of the Department of Community Development in the United States Operations Mission (USOM), the local office for the American Agency for International Development, began his remarks by thanking his hosts, the Thai Psychological Warfare School, thus making plain the link between community development with counterinsurgency (Ministry of Interior, 1962: 1).

The Ministry of Interior's history relates this particular version of the story with very little mention of American aid. American planners probably found it awkward and time-consuming to deal with this ancient ministry, through which everything from policing to education has sometimes been administered, and the ministry itself was probably not as flexible or as responsive as the American aid agency might have wanted. In any case, the swiftly emerging regime of development programs and projects and concerns about rural insurgency led to the creation of an entirely new Ministry of National Development in June 1963, about six months before Sarit died. It was his creation and he spoke at the opening ceremony of its establishment. One of the ministry's precursors was a committee that had been established in 1950 as a conduit for American aid and which later evolved into the Department of Technical and Economic Cooperation within the new Ministry of National Development. The Ministry of National Development's history acknowledges that in 1957 the United States, through USOM, had assisted with the establishment of a Community Development Project

that evolved into a Department of Community Development with responsibilities for agriculture, health and education when the new ministry was established (Ministry of National Development, 1964: 229). Community development was becoming part of the global discourse of development. In Gunnar Myrdal's massive 1968 study, *Asian Drama*, community development represented an effort "to spark a cumulative process of rural uplift in village societies encrusted by centuries of stagnation" (Myrdal, 1968: 1339).

Community development in mid-century Thailand — CD in aid argot or ARD (accelerated rural development) — had demonstrable counter-insurgency functions. Especially in the country's north and northeast, where rural poverty was seen to breed insurgency, community development was a strategy for drawing villages and villagers closer to sovereign government in order to keep them out of the hands of insurgents/communists. In the Thai bureaucracy's effort to grapple with the sub-sub-district level of the village community, it tried to create another level of government activity. Something very similar happened in the history of British colonialism in Burma, to make a comparative point, where the hereditary circle headmen, the *myo-thu-gyis*, were turned into government officials to allow government infrastructure to penetrate further into the countryside (Furnivall, 1956: 36–7). The conversion of these hereditary officials into colonial officials weakened bonds of community in the countryside (Taylor, 1987: 161).

Thus community (*chumchon*) acquired an identifiable history in the Thai bureaucracy in the name of administrative units charged with managing rural development programs, training officials and youth, improving the well-being of the community, rural productivity, family income and village industry, as well as health services, and education (Ministry of Interior, 1965: 260–1). The aims of these programs were strategic as much as for the betterment of society. In the bureaucratic upheaval during the Sarit period that began in 1958, the precise moment of the infusion of American aid, *chumchon* came to replace *thongthin* as if something new had come into being. Thongthin migrated into another semantic box and came to mean 'local'.[3] The meanings of community-*chumchon* began to change again during the open politics of the 1973–76 period, when the government's rural development policy shifted away from the construction of infrastructure for farming and toward infrastructure for the community (Kitahara, 1996: 30). The village community was no longer merely poor, backward and in desperate need of development. It was now to be valorised for values and norms

that were being eroded by modernity. In this sense, 'community' is an alternative to 'modernity'.

To close this discussion on the genealogies of the word, it is worth citing a provocative statement by Anan Ganjanapan, a Chiang Mai-based Thai anthropologist who expresses more curiosity than most about the career of community in Thai. He wonders whether *chumchon* is a figment of the academic imagination or a real thing that exists (or existed) and needs to be studied:

> Is *chumchon* something real that previously existed in Thai society and is now being destroyed? Or is it an academic theoretical concept constructed for the purpose of analyzing society? Or is it an ideological and romantic thing? And if community (*chumchon*) really exists can we not ask to have its distinctive features described? Do these distinctive features still have consequences and the potential to influence social movements today? (Anan, 2001: 109–10).

Anan is a hard-headed social scientist in sympathy with the NGO movement and with the attempts of academics to forge cooperative links with development workers but, as his searching questions about community suggest, he is sceptical of the discursive powers of 'community' to forge or reify the relationships, participation, and autonomy that the word is presumed to embody. He goes on to trace the career of community in the anthropological literature on Thailand, noting that the views of academic and government development workers in the 1960s were little different from the official attitudes in developing rural societies everywhere, namely, that "community life was terrible" and had to be corrected or improved (Anan, 2001: 113). This is not the view today, or perhaps it would be better to say it is only partly the view today.

COMMUNITY CULTURE

In the boom times of the late 1980s and early 1990s, public intellectuals, academics working in development and NGOs, began to embrace something called community culture (*watthanatham chumchon*). Community culture is not the creation of the bureaucracy or of government policy, and the history of the idea is fragmentary and difficult to document precisely. Although intellectuals had a hand in its creation, the idea grew out of seminars, workshops and collective efforts to factor

culture into development projects. One social scientist, Dr Kanchana Kaewthep, who left academia for NGO work, points to the mutual influence of conditions in Thailand in the late 1980s and the resolution of the United Nations' General Assembly to make 1988–97 the World Decade of Cultural Development. The economic boom in Thailand spurred the export of 'Made in Thailand' brands in world markets, and a public fuss in 1988 about the purloined Khmer lintel discovered in the Art Institute in Chicago pricked the national consciousness about Thai culture slipping away overseas (Kanchana, 1995: 72; Keyes, 2002b). In Kanchana's telling of the story, culture was ignored in development policies of the late 1950s and 1960s but later, in the second half of the 1980s, development theorists were disenchanted with economic development 'from outside' that did not take account of local culture. UNESCO and other global organisations were also taking cognisance of culture and fostering "indigenous theories of development" (Kanchana 1995: 74–5).

Typical of this shift in alternative development strategies in Thailand was interest in Mahatma Gandhi — some of Gandhi's work on the village was translated, published and disseminated in Thailand in 1985 (Apichart, 2004: 157, 175). Although Gandhi's ideas are under-researched and insufficiently recognised in Thai studies, what was appealing to NGO workers in Thailand is epitomised in the classic Gandhian statement on the village that dates from 1942:

> My idea of village *swaraj* is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Thus every village's first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth .... Any village can become such a republic today without much interference even from the present Government whose sole effective connection with the village is the exaction of the village revenue (Gandhi, 1991: 358–60).

For Gandhi, 'self-sufficiency', one of the words linked to community-chumchon, does not connote "narrowness" or isolation, because villagers may have to venture outside the village for some of the things they need (Gandhi, 1962: 63).

Gandhi's thinking about the village surfaced explicitly in the late 1990s in the work of Chatthip Nartsupha, who drew together different strands of the 'community culture' movement and advocated it. In an intensively researched volume of 1998 funded by the Thailand Research

Fund, Chatthip paid homage to all of his heroes: the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian socialist thinkers; Gandhi and village *swaraj*; Latin American economic historians; and the more recent community culturalists whom he has championed (Chatthip, 1998). Chatthip is an economic historian known for his Marxist interventions in the tumultuous 1970s and for founding the Chatthip school of economic history through his supervision of numerous graduate students. For two decades his approach to economic history has had repercussions in Thai debates about development and the impact of the global economy on small producers. Even before the 1997 crisis, he had embraced 'community culture' as an alternative response to the unintended consequences of rampant growth. Having been introduced early in his education to the work of Kropotkin (*Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*) and to the vision of Alexander Herzen (1812–70) of a peasant revolution that would bring forth small village communes, he sees himself — and has been described as — "a communitarian anarchist" (Chatthip, 2001a: xii). When reading Chatthip's work, one gets the distinct impression that he has already found these communes in the Thai countryside. He is an intellectual Buddhist but not a very pious one. He hates what he calls superstition in the animistic practices of ordinary Thai people but always respectfully acknowledges the importance of Buddhism at all levels of Thai life.

English readers now have access to Chatthip's *The Thai Village Economy in the Past*, first published in Thai in 1984, in which he argued that subsistence economies in rural Thailand continued through the late twentieth century in some regions (Chatthip, 1999). Indeed, peasant economies tend to be defined as subsistence agriculturalist (Elson, 1997: xix). Chatthip has stated the argument many times: that the village community is one of the most ancient institutions of Thai society; that the economic base of the village community was subsistence production and craft for own-use; that the kinship structure supported the communal nature of village life; and that the village community was a self-sustaining and relatively autonomous unit (Chatthip, 1996: 69–70). He cites a 1978 World Bank report on Thailand that documented a subsistence economy in most rural areas at the start of the first six-year development plan of 1961 (Chatthip, 1996: 72). This picture of autonomous village communities sounds very much like a modified version of Marx's Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP), and indeed, such an analysis can be seen to be an outgrowth of Chatthip's endorsement of the AMP during the 1970s. In *The Thai Village Economy*

in the Past, however, Chatthip turned away slightly from the AMP and rejected some of his earlier work that failed to recognise the extent to which the subsistence economy continued well into the middle of the twentieth century. In his revised thinking, the subsistence economy had stalled and failed to develop. This happened partly because capitalism was fostered by — or was in cahoots with — the state and it sought to maintain some areas of the country in subsistence economies as sources of cheap labour. Chatthip's ongoing adherence to the AMP as a social formation appropriate to Thailand's economic history is difficult to understand without reading Gandhi on village swaraj. Chatthip is really what one might call a Gandhian Marxist and 'thought' Gandhi before he had actually read Gandhi.

For Chatthip, the state and capitalism are outside institutions, foreign and unnatural to village life and resented by villagers. In his earlier work on the ideology of millennial movements, Chatthip wrote about "primitive communal consciousness" sustaining the village community in its resistance to outside influence (Chatthip, 1984). More recently, he has advocated community culture for its spirit, heart (*nam jai*), and great inner strength — perhaps he would also say 'solidarity'. Because Thailand was never directly colonised, the state did not intervene directly in production and culture. There was no plantation economy. The premodern state merely collected taxes and levied corvée demands, leaving the village more or less to its own devices. Although the village economy lacks dynamism, and its sturdiness, durability and capacity for tolerance can be obstacles to its own development, Chatthip believes it can be a force in the contemporary world. At times he seems to be saying that 'this is not poverty' but a praiseworthy way of life that we should try to preserve. His argument is that because the village community was spared interference by the state and retained its integrity, it can be a leader in economic development in a way that bourgeois culture cannot (Chatthip, 1997: 99–103).

One of the interesting things about Chatthip's thinking has been his interactions with Japanese anthropologists and sociologists, deriving from Japanese interests in community and the village since the 1950s, and even the occasional European social scientist. Many of these scholars contributed to a recent felicitation volume on village communities in honour of Chatthip (Nozaki and Baker, 2003). A brief essay by the Hungarian scholar, Ferenc Tokei, returned to many of Chatthip's favourite themes: the commune (or the "land community", as Tokei calls it in the Hungarian case) in world history; property relations and redistribution

of land in the commune; and the dissolution of communities under certain historical circumstances. A Japanese scholar revisited the village commune in the eyes of A.S. Khomiakov, D.N. Strukov and N.G. Chernyshevskii, the early Russian socialists. And yet another Japanese scholar discussed cooperative ventures in rural development through the work of Thai Buddhist monks. A Thai political economist studied "the buds of community business under capitalist domination". The scholarly networks Chatthip has cultivated over the past three decades and his catholic reading — not many Thai academics have looked into the history of socialism in Tsarist Russia — help account for the way the qualities of commune have been inserted into Thai *chumchon*. Some of the qualities such as mutual cooperation and generosity attributed to community in this scholarship go beyond the evidence. According to one astute assessment of how this scholarship has been applied to the Shan people in northern Thailand, 'communal' is hyped to the extent that Thai interpretations of their largely rural siblings, the Shan, demonstrate an elite Thai reminiscence for simplicity and tradition. At the same time, an impulse for authenticity and unity in these interpretations muddies differences between Shan in Burma and Shan in Thailand in the name of Tai community, or Tai-ness, though this objective is not always made explicit (Farrelly, 2003).

Chatthip, a keen advocate of the 'community culture' movement, has offered one of its most complete histories in Thai by showing its indigenous roots and linking it to the work of four well-known Thai intellectuals (Chatthip, 1991). One is Bamrung Bunpanya, from a wealthy peasant family in Surin Province and a graduate of Kasetsart University. Another is Apichart Thongyu, a middle-class graduate in geography and lecturer (in 1991) in the Central Region Public Health College. Apichart has worked in development for the Norwegian Save the Children Fund and, once upon a time, was a freelance musician and painter. He is also a poet. The third public intellectual, Dr Prawet Wasi, is perhaps best known in the development field. He is a haematologist, a graduate in medicine from Mahidol University and the University of Colorado, and has long been a critic of government, yet manages to retain the confidence and respect of the elite and those in power. Finally, there is Father Niphot Thianwihan, Director (in 1991) of the Centre for Social Development of the Catholic Council of Thailand for Development (CCTD), who has worked with the Karen in northern Thailand. What these people have in common, with the exception of Bamrung Bunpanya, is they did not grow up in community culture.

According to Chatthip's account, Father Niphot, possibly the progenitor of the 'community culture line of thinking', began to develop it in 1977, following a meeting of the Federation of Asian Bishops in Taipei in 1974 and a meeting of the Bishops' Institute for Social Action held in the Philippines.[4] While community culture has currency in the region and across religions, according to Chatthip's account, it is not altogether clear what exactly inspired Father Niphot to develop his community culture idea. What can be said is that the conference of bishops was concerned to contextualise evangelical work in Asian societies where Catholicism had to compete with other religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. The centralised, institutional Church encountered the limits of its authority as it came up against local community (Amaladoss, n.d.). Interestingly, considering that Thailand has a majority Theravada Buddhist population, the Catholic Church has played an important role in funding projects and disseminating the idea of community culture. Through the CCTD, which was established in 1960, it has published a number of books by these public intellectuals and development workers, including Kanchana Kaewthep. In her own writing she also acknowledges the work of a Catholic priest, Father Philippe Fanchette, in arguing for the importance of recognising local culture in development projects (Kanchana, 1995: 72).

A final example of how community has been launched into the realm of social movements may be seen in the work of Phitthaya Wongkun, a social scientist and public intellectual who has worked on a series of publications called the Vision series, under the overall editorial guidance of Thianchai Wongchaisuwan, who studied with James Petras and Emmanuel Wallerstein at the State University of New York at Binghamton (Reynolds, 2002: 322–4). These volumes, funded originally by the Thailand Research Fund, a government body, appeared at the astonishing rate of about one per month at the onset of the 1997 financial crisis. There were two separate series, one on globalisation and the other on local knowledge. Phitthaya has contributed to many of the volumes but in 1999 produced a book of his own, *Building a New Society: Communitocracy–Dhammocracy* (Phitthaya, 1999). Here 'community' is a governance word. It alludes to rule by the community and by Dhamma, the teachings of the Buddha. It is also a word that implies certain social practices and politics.

Whereas Chatthip combines ethnography and economic history with a sense of the movement of commune/community across cultures, languages and the East-West divide, Phitthaya is more interested in

community as a political movement. He discusses strategies, manoeuvres and methods for achieving his goals. He wants to reform the economy — eliminate the income gap, halt the severe damage to the environment that is taking place, create a just society and more humane politics. Genuine reform will bring a kind of Buddhist Utopia. Indeed, the pen-name of Phitthaya's collaborator, Thienchai, means 'Age of the Maitreya Buddha', a reference to the messianic Buddha-to-come who will deliver humanity from its suffering. Phitthaya's approach to the problems reminds us that just as there are families of words of which community is a part, so there is a dialectic of words — and wordplay — that sharpens the meanings. Community is pitted both against state, which is above and outside, and against family, which is below and inside. According to Phitthaya, community is superior to family, as family is too nuclear and individualistic. Community also contrasts with village, especially in contexts where the state has imposed the village order or set out domineering plans for its development.

It is difficult to say whether community culture should be identified as a new social movement, as some academic observers, such as the Thammasat University political scientist Chairat Charoensinolan, suggest (Chairat, 1999). Without wanting to join Chairat in analysing community culture as a discursive invention of academics and public intellectuals, I think its use as a polemic against inappropriate models of development and undue interference from the outside is undeniable. The lingering lure of community culture has to do with its ineffable qualities of shared labour, reciprocity and resistance to the outside menace of bureaucracy and meddling development workers. When some of these ideas are translated into English they sound irredeemably romantic and anachronistic, or just plain messy and hard to handle — the jello metaphor comes to mind — but the people who use these ideas sincerely seem to be able to overlook and even to embrace these shortcomings.

ON THE DEFENSIVE

Reading through the voluminous and sometimes repetitive literature about community and community culture, I was reminded of the Vietnamese folk saying that the power of the emperor comes to a halt at the bamboo fence of the village. There is a host of statements in the Thai-language material about the ability of the community — or the village community — to withstand or resist threats from the outside.

Here we are talking about the bounded territorial community, to use the old sociological terminology, rather than about networks or virtual communities of scholars and NGO workers or community/village as a discursive category. We can recall the late 1950s when the Thai government captured *chumchon* to designate a bounded administrative unit that could serve policy interests, delimiting community and reorienting those who live there. This deployment of community has been a long-standing interest of the Thai state, and the community culture movement stands for resistance to this statist project.

Apichart Thongyu is a middle-class lecturer in geography and one of the community culture advocates, so his authenticity as a village voice is suspect. In his poems he refers to the village-under-development as if it were bounded by a bamboo fence — and he wants to make sure that the fence is kept in good repair. The sentiments in his verses valorise village labour, particularly the agricultural labour that produces the food that feeds the rest of the country (Apichart, 1988: 39, 61, 131). The poems use the language of the city, of bureaucracy and of the specialised sciences that apply their expertise to development problems, in order to illustrate the irrelevance of these other worlds for daily village life. Possibly this approach is no longer realistic in today's world, but the autonomy, self-sufficiency and self-contained-ness described here echo the hoary caricature that features in Marx's oversimplified and out-of-date primitive, Asiatic commune.

The pre-history of community-*chumchon* in a language spoken by millions of peasant cultivators over ten centuries lies in the village, although as I have tried to show, the career of community-*chumchon* in Thai has been discontinuous. Communal land was made available to these cultivators, and they enjoyed help from fellow villagers, which they reciprocated when they worked their paddy fields. Their labour and the fruits of that labour were taxed by the premodern feudal state. The term for village in Tai languages, ban, is an old term, which can be paired with the term for city or state, *muang*, to mean homeland or native land (*ban muang*). Ban also refers to domestication and cultivation and is opposed to jungle or wild (*pa*) (Turton, 2000a: 21–2). Community-*chumchon* can only have the force it has in modern parlance as a word travelling into and out of the language and into and out of international conversations about development because its discontinuous history is anchored in older, if idealised, notions of ban, of village, villager, and village life. In recent years it has tried to shake off its history in the bureaucracy of development. The advocates

of the community culture movement have reinvented the concept by giving it decidedly Gandhian meanings. Conferences in the region of Roman Catholic theologians have also played their part in re-investing community with moral force. When one peers closely at the history of community in the Thai language, valorised because it empowers people to withstand the disruptive effects of development, it is clear that the Left as well as the Right have become its ardent defenders. Both Uncle Karl and Uncle Sam have a lot to answer for.

3

Building Modern Communities in Capitalist Thailand

James Haughton

A central theme of the Thai discourse of community is that community is opposed to modernity and, specifically, to capitalist, market-driven modernity. The disdain felt for capitalism, globalisation and markets by the proponents of community is quite understandable. It was inflows of foreign investment and cosy alliances between wealthy merchant families and military generals that propped up Thailand's past military regimes. Later, the reckless outflows of foreign capital brought about the 1997 financial crisis with its damaging effects on the poor and the humiliating loss of economic 'sovereignty' to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The opposition of community and globalised modernity has been accompanied by another opposition, that of morality and economy: people in communities act according to morality; people in the modernist market act according to economic imperatives. Again, given that the experience of many in what might be called the community movement of economics as an ideology masking domination — either the neo-liberal kind offered by the IMF or the Marxist kind offered by the former Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) — some hostility to social analysis or prescriptions cast in economic terms is understandable.

However, refusal to consider the economic underpinnings of community limits the strategies that those wishing to defend communities can deploy. Worse, a refusal to address the economic issues plays into the hands of the market-driven capitalism against which pro-community

activists rail. If the economic circumstances and structures within which a vision of community can be sustained are not understood or appreciated, then the vision will be unsustainable. The following case study gives an example of this misunderstanding in action in an NGO-sponsored "community culture and self-sufficiency" project.

During 2003, I visited a cluster of villages in Roi Et Province of north-east Thailand (commonly referred to as Isan). These villages, and much of Roi Et and the surrounding provinces, are located in an area north of the Dangrek (Fire) Mountains that separate Thailand from Cambodia. The area is a part of the Mun River basin known as the Thung Kula Long Hai, which might be translated as the 'Weeping Traveller Plains'. The local people I interviewed were unsure of the name's derivation. However, this mournful name may reflect the poor agricultural prospects, which suffer from a combination of sandy, salty soils and erratic rainfall. Despite the environmental challenges, the area has been settled by agriculturalists since at least the twelfth century AD, as the numerous Khmer ruins in the province attest (Chalit, 1999). The long history of agricultural settlement may be one cause of the area's marginal productivity because ancient Khmer irrigation-intensive agriculture was plagued by deforestation and rising salinity (Coe, 2003; Diamond, 2005).

This cluster of villages became part of a community development effort funded by the international NGO Redd Barna (the Norwegian branch of Save the Children) and run by a Thai NGO in the mid-1980s. This was at a time when a three-year drought caused great poverty and hardship in many areas of Isan. Simultaneously, Bangkok enjoyed a foreign investment, export-oriented industry and tourism-led boom, but little of this wealth seemed to percolate to the countryside (Feeny, 2003).[1] The combination of great central wealth and rural poverty and suffering convinced many that export-oriented, market-led development had little to offer rural people except condescension and exploitation (Pasuk and Baker, 1996: 141–66). At the time, the military-dominated state had only just emerged victorious from its struggle with the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), which had been headquartered in the northeast. Accordingly, the Thai state was likely to view any political activism to solve the region's problems as a communist resurgence to be put down with force. Thais concerned about rural poverty, many of whom had 'gone to the jungle' and experienced the CPT's failure firsthand, looked for solutions to poverty that involved neither confronting nor acquiescing to state power and

the state-sponsored capitalist mode of development. They needed to find more politically palatable methods of defending the poor against the negative impacts of the military-bureaucratic-capitalist alliance that governed in the 1980s.

NGOs AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

The solution they found was to foster the capacity of rural villages to be self-sufficient. This solution enabled self-sufficient communities to make political claims upon the state from a conservative direction that favoured traditional Thai culture and did not raise the spectre of communist revolution. This ecologically and morally conservative — and royally supported — vision of reinforcing the original self-sufficient social, moral and economic forms could also enable villagers to avoid or endure surplus extraction by the modern capitalist system.

A firm grounding was provided for this strategy by the historical and anthropological studies of Thai villages carried out by Chatthip Nartsupha (1999) and his colleagues (see also Chapters 2 and 4). These studies proposed that Thai villages had previously possessed social or economic forms based upon a subsistence economy with few connections to the outside world. Their high level of self-sufficiency meant that they could endure surplus extraction without suffering undue hardship or socio-economic change.

Chatthip saw this history as an example of Marx's Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP), in which surplus is extracted directly from the peasantry by a centralised state apparatus with little interest in rural society beyond the requirement to pay taxes-in-kind (Marx, 1853a; 1853b). In contrast to Europe, the AMP excludes any independent feudal or merchant class which might have an interest in improving the productivity of their subjects or clients. Chatthip's analysis kept Marx's analytical framework, in which Asiatic rural society is seen as fundamentally unchanging, but reversed its moral presumptions. Marx had considered that the Asiatic village was stagnant and despotic and needed to be disrupted by colonial capitalism for the long-term good of the inhabitants. In contrast, Chatthip suggested that the village was self-sufficient, harmonious and based on an environmentally sustainable local morality. This original moral economy is believed to have survived unchanged from the distant past.

This strategic adoption of a particular vision of local community also fitted well with growing radical and reformist currents within Thai

Buddhism. The inhabitants of Isan were inclined to turn to Buddhist radicals during periods of crisis, as they had in the first half of the century during the 'holy men' (*phu mi bun*) revolts against the expansion of Bangkok's central authority (Turton and Tanabe, 1984; Reynolds, 2000; Seri and Hewison, 2001). Many on the left hoped that Buddhist monks could now provide leadership in resisting the expansion of commercialism. Monks enthused by this vision saw communal withdrawal into self-sufficiency and the abandonment of market-driven desires for consumer goods as analogous to the individual quest for enlightenment. This other-worldly doctrine was particularly strong in the Santi Asoke movement (Sulak, 1986). Theologically, Buddhists inspired by Bikkhu Buddhadasa drew inspiration from the South American Catholic Liberation Theology.[2] This was itself inspired by the economic doctrine of dependency theory, which also stressed withdrawal from unequal exchanges with the world market. Liberation Theology stressed that the 'kingdom of heaven' should not be sought after death but in the present, and that suffering was not due to original sin, to be accepted meekly, but to this-worldly oppression that should be resisted. The Catholic Council of Thailand for Development was particularly influential in spreading these ideas (Tavivat, 1994; Reynolds, Chapter 2).

Subsequently, 'development monks' spearheaded many efforts to mobilise villagers. Monks encouraged their followers to forsake drinking, gambling and the desire for material goods, considered as vices in Buddhism, and instead to adopt innovative methods of sharing their assets, such as medical cooperatives, buffalo banks and rice banks, women's weaving groups and other savings groups. These were capitalised by adapting traditional merit-making ceremonies, in which wealthy patrons would buy new robes for monks or buy buffaloes to save them from slaughter. Patrons were encouraged to make their donations not just to monks but to village development funds founded by monks, and to donate the buffaloes they saved from slaughter to rotating buffalo banks (Seri, 1988).

In many villages these innovations lasted throughout the period of crisis and received outside support from foreign NGOs. Once the drought broke and economic growth began to reach rural areas, especially through migrant remittances, many such community organisations gradually collapsed under the weight of non-performing loans and community disinterest. Almost every village I visited in Isan featured a closed rice bank and a boarded-up cooperative shop.

Figure 3.1 A rice store constructed with NGO funds.

NGOs AND MARKET TRANSITIONS IN ROI ET

The villages in Roi Et were exceptional in having avoided this fate. Rice banks, buffalo banks, savings groups and numerous other village enterprises were still active. This was not the result of exceptional charismatic leadership by local monks, as was the case in some other communally oriented villages (Darlington, 1990). The abbot of the local temple said that his role was limited to providing a place for discussion and counselling to local youth suffering from drug-related problems. Yet local NGO members were extremely mixed in their feelings towards this success. As I discussed the history of the projects with village representatives, NGO staff, academics and other villagers who took part in the income-raising activities, it became clear that the cause of both survival and unhappiness was that the projects had undergone a gradual but fundamental change in their orientation, from being directed away from the market to being directed towards it.

The village rice bank is a good example. This organisation was originally created to avoid the necessity for villagers facing rice shortages (a common occurrence during droughts) to beg from neighbours or borrow rice at usurious rates from local merchants. Rice could be borrowed at a fixed interest rate and deposited by farmers with

sufficient rice, who would then receive interest paid in rice. Initially, the rice bank only dealt in sticky (glutinous) rice, the dietary staple of the area. The process of accommodating markets apparently began when some borrowers desired to repay their rice debts in plain rice, which, although also eaten locally, is grown primarily as a cash crop. When this was permitted, the question naturally arose of what rate of exchange should prevail between sticky and plain rice, so the local market prices of the two commodities were looked to in order to settle this rate.

Once this arbitration by the market was agreed upon, it was a short step to agreeing that repayments could be made in cash and then broadening the rice bank's functions to incorporate cash loans as well. The rice bank began to act as the local rice broker for plain rice, buying rice from farmers at harvest time and selling it before the next harvest when prices were high. While the prices offered by the rice bank were said to be better than what merchants from outside the village used to offer, and the profits were distributed within the village in the form of interest on deposits, it could not be denied that the bank had in essence become a business enterprise — a community business, perhaps, but in the minimal sense of "a business located within the community" (Arghiros and Moller, 2000: 160). The main reason that the bank still had some dealings in sticky rice was as a supply for certain religious festivals at which sticky rice offerings must be made to the monks. Wealthier households no longer grew sticky rice, preferring the higher-priced jasmine rice to sell and possibly also to consume as a marker of status, so the rice bank became a convenient source for these ritual necessities. This is evidence of a dramatic economic and cultural transition. Not so long ago, the idea that a household might not grow enough glutinous rice for ritual purposes, not due to poverty but as a result of a decision to grow cash crops instead, would have seemed absurd. In this case, the cultural form of glutinous rice offering has been preserved, but the fundamental importance of glutinous rice to subsistence, symbolised by the offering, has been removed by the same orientation to the market that has kept the rice bank operational. A few poor villagers selected by the headman to be interviewed were quite bitter about the entire process, saying that the rice bank and the NGO no longer helped the poor. NGO workers expressed a spirit of pragmatism, saying that they were pleased that the rice bank had retained relevance, but they also expressed a hostile attitude towards the market orientation of the villagers.

The village buffalo bank had undergone a similar transition. Founded through the merit-making practice of purchasing buffaloes to save them from slaughter, its original purpose was to form a revolving and naturally growing herd of buffalo from which each household could draw until all had sufficient animals for ploughing and reproduction. This plan had been rendered obsolete when increasing economic prosperity in the 1990s enabled most households to buy or rent small hand-held tractors. I was told that it was much easier to plough fields and transport goods with a diesel tractor than with a buffalo. NGO leaders expressed strong disapproval of this transition, claiming that hand-held tractors reduced the fertility of fields through increased erosion and the absence of manure, and tied farmers to unpredictable markets for diesel fuel and fertiliser. Nevertheless, their objections did not seem to carry much weight.

The rotational fund structure endured, however, as did the physical presence of the animals, now bred for their value to the meat markets of Bangkok — a rather ironic change in light of the founders' meritorious motivations. Yet it was clear that cattle commanded higher prices than buffalo, and farmers found it more economic to buy them as calves, raise them and sell them rather than actually breeding them. The buffalo bank fund thus became a rotating cash fund from which members could borrow to facilitate purchasing their animals. This was, by village standards, a high-risk investment, especially given the incidence of disease, and so one in which only richer households took part.

Other enterprises had expanded through the perhaps more traditional Thai, but not exactly self-sufficient, method of attracting powerful patrons. The women's savings and loan co-operative had been so successful that it attracted a large grant from the Asian Development Bank to build a new headquarters, which also functioned as a community centre. Many small enterprises run by local women were now busy raising chickens, making desserts and so on for local markets, although some were stagnant, with a local piecework clothing maker expressing the desire for the NGO to help clothing makers find more markets. NGO staff were interested in expanding the range of agricultural products produced for permacultural purposes, but although increased diversity of production was being embraced, integrated farming was not. An appeal to Thai Airways had resulted in a massive pool being dug to supply fish to the village. The deputy headman explained that it was only due to the additional schooling and training he had received in project proposals, composing budgets and other such tasks from the NGO that he had had the courage to write to Thai Airways.

Figure 3.2 A village handicraft trade show in an upmarket Bangkok hotel. The clientele were predominantly professional expatriates or their spouses.

Similar processes of transition from community-oriented development projects have been documented by several other researchers. Erik Cohen (2000) documented the way in which a village weaving group, owing its success to fortuitous patronage by Queen Sirikit, became a successful export-oriented business run by, and for the profit of, one of the founding members, while the other group members became piece workers. Arghiros and Moller (2000) document the same process occurring in government rural business promotion schemes. Darlington (1990) studied a 'Buddhist development' agency in northern Thailand, the Foundation for Education and Development of Rural Areas run by Phra Thepkavi, and found that the abbot's personal charisma and advocacy were unable to prevent villagers adopting cash crops or selling land to speculators. Her account suggests that even the presence of charismatic 'development monks' may be insufficient to prevent capitalism from gaining a hold.

NGOs have, of course, become aware of the ways in which community-based projects come to operate according to a profit-making, market-based logic. The following passage, published in 1986, sums up the majority response:

> Studying the impact of the rice bank, it is found that the activity has developed a number of capitalists among the villages. Social concern and moral based mutual assistance have turned out as a new relationship influenced by the urban business system. Village people are joining together for beneficial purposes, not with morality as it used to be. The new activity: the rice bank seems to give the villagers an outsider's consciousness, which replaces the peoples' original way of assisting each other.
>
> Nowadays, one of the problems villagers face is the exploitation of outside capitalists or rich merchants. The rice bank tends to be an attempt to solve the problem, but unexpectedly by its process, has promoted another group of villagers to exploit the poor. This group is called "the small capitalists." They are rich farmers who are members of the rice bank. These people find that if they share their rice with the group, at the end of the year they can make a profit from the increasing interest according to their original shares. These people sometimes become the agent of the new business system with the outside. For example, when rice in the bank is not available for the members to borrow, "The Small Capitalists" will contact and borrow it from the rich merchants, in order to provide opportunity for the poor to borrow it at higher interest. And in doing this, they will get some compensation from the rich merchants secretly (Apichart Thongyou in Seri, 1986: 61–2).

The interpretation placed upon such transitions by Apichart Thongyou, a prominent NGO leader and former project administrator for Redd Barna, is quite clear: it is a transition from a moral economy of community to an economic morality of the marketplace. This transition, while admittedly arising within the village, is clearly produced from outside: projects give villagers an "outsider's consciousness", which leads to them acting according to (financial) benefit rather than morality and forming secret deals with outsider capitalists to further exploit the poor. Rather than the countryside surrounding the city, as the Maoist CPT would have had it (Marks, 1994), or bringing co-operative morality to the city, as Chatthip (1991) had hoped, the village has again been seduced and penetrated by a mode of production imposed from the outside and morality has been replaced by collaboration in surplus extraction. Community and the market are once again opposed.

THE PREMODERN TAI POLITICAL ECONOMY

This set of arguments represents a Thai version of Polanyi's (1944) "great transformation". Polanyi argued that the Industrial Revolution in

England was experienced as a "disembedding" of the economy. Before this point, the economy was governed by, embedded within and inseparable from the social structures of the time. Afterwards, the economy became an independent domain of its own, which could be analysed as such through the new discipline of economics and which functioned without reference to other social obligations. The capitalist undermining of Chatthip's Asiatic village, which was characterised by a morality of locally oriented sustainability, is a classic example of this process.

This idea of a fundamental opposition between a past economy embedded in community culture and a present economy of alienated modernity has many critics. Drawing on economic history, Bowie (1992) has argued that trade and markets have played a long-term and crucial historical role in rural Thailand. Others (such as Kemp, 1996 and Reynolds, Chapter 2) have argued that the very elements valorised by the 'community culture' school, such as villages and the term 'community' itself, are themselves recent state constructions. However, these objections can be accommodated within Chatthip's Asiatic community framework. Trade networks are necessary if surplus is to be conveyed to the centre, while the creation of villages by administrative fiat is evidence for, rather than against, an Asiatic state keeping its subjects in unchanging, subsistence thraldom. Consequently, these objections do not fundamentally challenge the community culture vision of local communities that operate within a moral, rather than a self-interested, economy.

Striking more directly at Chatthip's political economy, Evers (1987) argues that the early Thai state, at least from its Ayutthayan period onwards, saw the control of *foreign* trade as its chief source of revenue and had little interest in the extraction of agricultural surplus, contrary to most versions of the Asiatic mode. If this is the case, then Chatthip's argument that the state prevented village communities from developing beyond a subsistence level by oppressive taxation collapses. However, discounting the numerous accounts of community subsistence and state oppression collected by Chatthip and his collaborators seems implausible.

This mismatch in portrayals of the premodern political economy is best reconciled by examining the nature of surplus extraction by the premodern Thai state. According to the Marxist understanding of history drawn on by Chatthip, the nature of surplus extraction is the key to determining which mode of production dominates in an era (Hindess and Hirst, 1975). By focussing on this issue of surplus

extraction we can also examine how the moral economy that many NGOs seek to support, which they believe comes from this era, came into being.

Surplus is usually extracted by elites through their monopoly of key factors of production and reproduction. This monopoly is most profitably extended over the scarcest factor of production. A feudal mode, for example, is defined by elite monopoly of scarce productive land and the extraction of surplus by means of rent. However, as early European visitors enviously noted, Siam was a country with abundant food and had no need to struggle for control of farmland, the basis of Europe's feudal system. Instead, the overwhelming concern of the ruling classes was control of labour. The principal tax was the corvée and large segments of the population — Chatthip (1999: 30) cites an estimate of one-quarter of the population — were to some degree enslaved. The many legally defined degrees of slavery in the Ayutthayan era can be juxtaposed with the almost complete lack of interest in land title to show where the priorities of the state lay (Feeny, 1989). Successful wars against rival centres were followed by depopulation of the conquered areas as nobles and craftsmen were carried back to the centre and subject populations forced to resettle in more convenient locations for future corvée extraction. Much of the population of Isan today is composed of the descendents of relocated victims of the Siamese conquest of Laos in 1828, forcibly resettled in the inhospitable terrain after Chao Anu's revolt (Wyatt, 1984: 172–4).[3]

The ideological governance of the state also reflected the fact that land and produce were unimportant compared to control over people. The rulers of Siam, trained in Indic Buddhist statecraft, had traditionally conceptualised the state as a 'galactic polity' in which the business of the world revolved, symbolically and politically, around the quasi god-king. Power extended outwards from the royal centre, becoming weaker until it overlapped with those of other powers in the nebulous border territories, which often paid homage or tribute to several overlords (Tambiah, 1976; Thongchai, 1994). That the royal, central city was essentially the state may be illustrated by the fact that the common words for 'city' and 'nation' in Thai are the same, *muang*. Outside and symbolically opposed to the muang is the *pa*, the forest, the haunt of wild animals, bandits and uncivilised people. As a result, control of territory was unimportant until encroachment by European colonial powers created the necessity for these nebulous regions to be firmly defined, placed and mapped as definitively subordinate to the

imperial centre (Thongchai, 1994). These policies inevitably retarded any kind of development as it is now defined. Urban growth outside the centre could only be seen as a threat in the zero-sum game of population control: a relative abundance of land and natural resources meant that there was little impetus to develop high-productivity agriculture, and private trade was difficult to pursue when so much of the time of the kingdom's subjects was consumed by forced labour. As Chatthip (1999: 75) put it:

> ... state and capitalism extracted surplus directly from the village by force rather than through the economic mechanism. This retarded the development of other classes between state and village and deprived the village of the leadership of a reforming landlord class or progressive bourgeoisie [with an interest in production improvement] .... The Thai state limited any development at the provincial level by coopting provincial leaders completely onto the side of the state. It did not support and sometimes suppressed any collaboration at the regional level which the centre did not accept. As a result, regional towns were not independent and not important.

The nature of a labour-scarce political economy demands that force plays a large role in the relationship between social classes. This is because a shortage of labour is a subjective condition — there must not be enough labour for some end beyond survival because the existence of labour presupposes its survival. A feudal peasant may suffer from a shortage of land to produce crops and a capitalist worker from lack of money, but the idea that labour, which is to say humans, are in short supply implies that other resources are relatively abundant. Under these conditions of abundant natural resources and simple, home-made production technology, any household could be largely self-sufficient in food,[4] only suffering from labour shortages at crisis points in the agricultural cycle or the Chayanovian household life cycle (Evans, 1995). Thus there was little structural impetus to form groups beyond the level of co-operating households. A supra-village ruling class could not claim legitimacy to rule based upon controlling access of their subjects to a scarce resource — the scarce resource was their subjects who, unless forced or born into slavery, possessed themselves. Whereas feudal modes of production involved clashes over land, and capitalism produced conflicts over capital, under the conditions of pre-modern Siam, the conflict was over the very bodies of the participants,

unmediated by any other resource or commodity. Only defence against the raids of other labour-seeking rulers, controlling access to the commodities provided by foreign trade, and the allures of spectacle and religion could effectively create common interests between rulers and ruled. Force had to suffice for the rest. Once accumulated, labour could be used for warfare to acquire more labour, conspicuously consumed through polygamy (which, in the sequestration of women practised by premodern Thai royalty, consumed both the productive and reproductive potential of the women involved), mobilised for the construction of temples and the support of non-labouring monks, and used to stage the lavish performances of a "theatre state" which could impress and draw in more followers (Geertz, 1980).

The main concerns of the Ayutthayan and early Chakri rulers were control of trade and control of corvée labour, each of which supported the other (Evers, 1987; Feeny, 1989). Possessing a powerful army enabled the Siamese to control the India-China trade artery by securing the vital land route across the Isthmus of Kra. In turn, control of the trade route enabled the Siamese rulers to obtain supplies of prestige goods and thus purchase the loyalty of their entourage. King Taksin, the founder of the current kingdom — though not the current dynasty — was of the opinion that the previous kingdom of Ayutthaya had fallen to the Burmese because the king had lost control of corvée labour to the noble families and was thus unable to field a strong central army (Feeny, 1989).

The conditions of labour shortage also affected the structure of society at the village level. Tai villagers banded together during labour-intensive phases of the rice planting and harvest, giving rise to the often-celebrated tradition of labour exchange. Petty chieftains and spiritual authorities were able to draw upon this labour in a non-reciprocal manner by providing defence and spiritual/medical services in return (Delcore, 2003). These local authorities attempted to form entourages and patron-client systems in order to distribute the labour of their entourage to their advantage. Because demonstrating religious piety demands sacrifice, Theravada Buddhist communities gave up the valuable labour of healthy young men when they became physically inactive monks, supported by the community. All these traditions are now considered the fundamentals of community by today's NGOs but their common root in labour shortages, and thus their vulnerability to a shift in the mode of production, has been ignored. The abundance of other natural resources enabled Tai village society to be "loosely

structured", as Embree's (1950) famous paper put it, when he compared it to land-scarce feudal Japan. This reflected the capacity of households to be relatively self-sufficient and thus preserve a high degree of independence from any larger community.

In sum, village society was neither separate from, nor penetrated by, some outside mode of production, but was shaped by the same forces as the state and was therefore inseparable from the state that sought to exploit it. When villagers could escape corvée, they could be self-sufficient as Chatthip would have it. However, the condition of their self-sufficiency — an abundance of natural resources relative to labour — was also what drove the power-seeking elite to establish corvée and slave-ownership over them. Contrary to what the Asiatic Mode model suggests, there was no point in investing this labour in agriculture. Instead, labour was used to establish control over prestige goods, which brought more followers. The labour-scarce, or semi-Asiatic, mode of production produced both the prestige good trade networks noted by Evers (1987) and Bowie (1992) and Chatthip's (1999) self-sufficient village economy, from which surplus was extracted not in rice but in labour.

MODE OF PRODUCTION TRANSITIONS IN THE MODERN ERA

Since the mid-nineteenth century, Thailand's economy has transformed from the semi-Asiatic Mode, which incorporated the village moral economy praised by NGOs, to a capitalist mode. The transition from the labour-scarce mode of production spread outwards from the royal centre of Bangkok, driven by both the self-interest of the rulers and pressure from the Western powers. The later rulers of the Chakri dynasty, in particular Rama IV (Mongkut) and Rama V (Chulalongkorn), came under heavy pressure from the Western powers to change the economic and administrative structures of the kingdom. In order to join the 'civilised', post-feudal capitalist West, they were required to abolish slavery and polygamy, signs of the labour-scarce mode, and establish a Western-style Weberian 'rational bureaucratic' government and court system, including well-defined land and property rights along with a rationalised system of tax gathering and tariffs.

Under these changed conditions, the economy of Bangkok and the central regions of Thailand can be said to have passed through a 'semi-feudal' mode in which a principal method of surplus extraction

was rent upon irrigated rice fields. The alternative revenue stream for the aristocracy of rents from the new privately owned irrigated rice fields made the abandonment of slavery and corvée possible (Feeny, 1989). Labour became less valuable as the price of slaves steadily declined. This mode was always partially capitalist in nature because the irrigation canals were built not with corvée or bonded labour but with an imported Chinese proletariat, paid for by exports of rice and cash taxes upon the peasantry. The landlords were not interested in consuming the produce of their lands directly, and they did not use the produce to feed their entourages and fighting forces, as was the case in feudal Europe. The rice surplus was intended for the cash export market.

The institution of tax-farming represents another transitional method of surplus extraction, whereby the underdeveloped and ephemeral government structures of the labour-scarce mode could accumulate monetary capital without significant investment. The monopolisation of vice, especially opium and prostitution, and key commodities such as salt, on which much of the tax farming system was based, indirectly controlled and effectively extracted surplus from the new proletariat, using methods with which the old trading and manpower-controlling elite were familiar.

As Chatthip (1999: 44–59) documents, the change in the mode of production in the central region of Thailand was a gradual one. Many central Thai villagers were liberated by the change from corvée to cash taxes, which they could meet from the improved productivity of irrigated land. Some farmers in the central region grew affluent, and with affluence came debt, inequality and land consolidation, creating wealthy merchant farmers and a landless labourer and future proletariat class. Spread of the new agricultural technologies of irrigation and chemical fertiliser resulted in large-scale, capital-intensive farming becoming economically viable. This gave capitalist landholders incentives to increase their holdings and drove down the relative value of labour, thus creating a large landless class (Bell, 1969; Marks, 1994).

In the peripheral regions of Siam such as Isan, the transition was much sharper. The central government preferred to invest in railroads rather than agricultural or industrial improvement (Feeny, 2003). The railroads enabled new taxation and administrative systems to be introduced in areas only lightly touched by the previous mode's demands of corvée and tribute. Provision of forest products had been the major demand made by the kingdom of its peripheral peoples. The sudden shift to a universal cash tax, administered by an efficient and centralised

government bureaucracy, hit labour-oriented and largely self-sufficient economies hard. As Morris (2002) suggests, the shift in economics and governance that led to the 'holy men' revolts was also experienced as a metaphysical crisis. The new role of money as a symbol of government power, commodity production and transformation was denied by the prophecy that all symbols would transform into the things symbolised, that flowers named for gold would become gold. Sadly, the gold for taxes and commodities could not be produced by miracles but only by rapidly expanding rice production, which placed increasing pressure on the resource base. Periodic 'holy men' revolts erupted in Isan until the 1950s, when the introduction of cash crops and anti-communist aid provided a partial solution to the chronic insolvency of the periphery (Chatthip, 1999: 70; Seri and Hewison, 2001: 70–9).

Misunderstanding the nature of this crisis was one reason that the communist revolt failed to win over large numbers of Thai subjects in Isan. As their appeal to the Thai farmer was based upon the Maoist revolution in post-feudal China, they were actually offering 'land to the tiller'. However, most farmers in Isan already owned their own land or could acquire more by clearing forests (Marks, 1994). The farmers struggled to meet the external and internal demands for taxes and commodities, not to wrest land from grasping landholders. As the consistently pro-socialist policies of parliamentary delegates from Isan showed, Isan farmers wanted more control over the policies of the centre in order to direct needed capital resources their way (Keyes, 1967). The farmers wanted to penetrate and command the centre, whereas the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) — which saw Bangkok as a bastion of imperialist capitalism similar to Shanghai — wished to surround and destroy its pre-eminent power. Ultimately the Thai state, under the guidance of American aid and counter-insurgency agencies, offered Isan a share of the benefits of capitalism through road construction, which enabled large-scale migration, cash crops and army-subsidised incursions into frontier areas where settlers would plant the cash crops and drive out the jungle-based CPT.

The combination of more intensive cash cropping and an expanding frontier enabled the rural community to generate a monetary income without fundamentally changing their social dynamics. Indeed, the high labour demands at various points in the cropping cycle combined with low levels of monetisation have meant that labour exchange relationships have endured until the present in some locations. However, as Elson (1997) argues, the boom in village settlement, cash cropping

and population caused by the opening of markets carried the seeds of transformation. The existing mode of production could only endure in an unchanging manner as long as labour continued to be scarce compared to abundant natural resources. In other words, the village community was stable as long as there was an open frontier to absorb population growth.

In the case of Isan, this frontier was both created and placed under pressure almost from the beginning of Tai settlement. Large populations were forcibly deported from Laos to Isan throughout the nineteenth century in response to the Chao Anu revolt and the threat of French encroachment. The refugee populations of Laos attempted to farm rice on the arid Khorat plateau without large-scale water control, unlike the previous Khmer inhabitants. This form of agriculture required constant migration and expansion as populations increased and soil fertility was exhausted, resulting in environmental degradation and deforestation (Yukio, 1999). This process has been accelerated in the current era by the impact of cash cropping, the timber trade and anti-communist oriented clearing of jungles (Pasuk and Baker, 1996: 142–6, 152–4).

NGOs AND COMMUNITY TODAY

In the twenty-first century, the frontier is finally closing. Conflicts over natural resources, often expressed in the new rhetoric of environmentalism, are emerging at an unprecedented rate, moderated only by the unreliable safety valve of a capitalist wage-labour economy. This increase in resource conflict could be slowed but not stopped by land redistribution, which seems unlikely ever to happen given the repeated failure of efforts to do so (Hirsch, 1990; Pasuk and Baker, 1996: 156).

While much of Thailand's economy and society has made a transition to capitalism, the older patron-client hierarchies and other social structures shaped by the semi-Asiatic labour-scarce mode still persist (Reynolds and Lysa, 1983). The understandings and discourses stemming from those social structures continue to be deployed by both elite and subordinate groups within Thailand in liberatory, creative, conservative and oppressive ways, even as capitalism erodes their relevance. In particular, many in the academic, civil society and NGO sector of Thailand seek to preserve premodern features of rural communities, such as subsistence agriculture and labour exchange (Seri and Hewison, 2001). They have made use of the traditional Buddhist practices of alms-giving to raise donations for rural communities to

pursue self-sufficiency, and have used Buddhist practices of forest retreat and blessing in 'ordaining' trees to save them from logging (Seri, 1988; Tannenbaum, 2000; Isager and Ivarsson, 2002). Rural villagers themselves, particularly those from the northeast, make use of the traditional rules of conduct governing relations between rulers and ruled (*het sip song kong sip si*), to argue for the duty of care owed to them by local governors. And they assert common loyalty to Thailand, Buddhism and the king in order to claim their rights from the Thai state (Ratana, 1997; Missingham, 2003).

However, traditional modes of behaviour have already been systematically refashioned to fit the imperatives of the capitalist economy. Labour exchange, if it occurs at all, is quantified monetarily; livestock acquired by alms-giving is kept or sold according to market value; and the balance between subsistence and market agriculture is struck on the basis of the prices of crops (Rigg and Sakunee, 2001; Darlington, 1990). Buddhist merit and status within Thai village society are increasingly determined by cash contributions to temples rather than any other criteria (Buapun, 2000). Internal migration and movement, though often condemned as destructive of villages and sexually threatening when engaged in by women, represents a profound break with the restricted movement permitted to Thai farmers and workers in the premodern era and is vital to both the economies of rural households and the self-image of the migrants as 'modern' (Morris, 2002; Jeffrey, 2002; Rigg and Sakunee, 2001; Mills, 1993; 1999b).

Under these circumstances of rapid change, it is hardly surprising that rural people pursue multiple economic strategies to survive. We should expect 'villagers' to embrace petty capitalist development and a diversity of local economic systems and activities that will seem thoroughly ambiguous to those embracing the Asiatic Mode model in which labour shortage and a dichotomy between state and village are prominent features (Rigg and Sakunee, 2001). Villagers must answer to both the demand for cash and the demands of tradition, and they can do this by adjusting their traditions to generate cash. If NGOs believe that tradition is independent of economic forces, this will be seen as a corruption or betrayal. However, if they recognise that the traditions were devised to meet the economic demands of the previous labour-scarce mode of production, they are more likely to acknowledge the importance of ongoing adaptation to the constraints of the current mode.

This dialectic between a semi-Asiatic ideology, or relation of production, and capitalist forces of production was recently reproduced

at the state level by the political contest between the government of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (2001–06) and the palace-endorsed, military-backed 'sufficiency economy'. This was not, however, a simple dichotomy between old and new. Both sides of the confrontation, whether implicitly or explicitly, recognised the hybrid and articulated nature of Thailand's political economy. Thus Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais) Party explicitly promoted a 'dual track' strategy of rural economic stimulation and handicraft promotion at the village level, combined with a mix of economic nationalism and free market internationalism at the state level. The attempt to combine these diverse elements contributed to Thaksin's downfall when the nationalist economic fervour he had promoted turned against his tax-free sale of 'national' assets to Singapore.[5]

Meanwhile, the royal family and the September 2006 royalist coup makers promote an anti-market and anti-urban 'sufficiency economy' yet retreat rapidly from any suggestion that this involves interference in the market. The sufficiency economy started as a royally sponsored program for small farmers to make efficient use of their land through permaculture-like techniques but has grown to a vague, all-encompassing philosophy of being content with one's lot. While the sufficiency economy concept offers a potentially sustainable 'exit strategy' from capitalism back to subsistence for farmers who choose to practise it, promoting such a strategy as the solution to social ills implicitly denies any entitlement to state financial support. The rhetoric of sufficiency demands that one stand on one's own two *rai*,[6] not request help from the government or unemployment assistance from the taxes of the capitalist class.

Unsurprisingly, the clash between two poles of political power, each of which appropriated the discourse of the other and neither of which was clearly pro- or anti-capitalist, split the NGO movement along partisan lines. Many of the 'forest' generation had allied themselves with the Thai Rak Thai Party's rural welfare schemes. Many others saw this as capitulation to capitalism and preferred to support the 'traditional' subsistence economy, even if this meant consolidating royal influence in the shaping of government policy.

Are NGOs' aspirations for 'community' thus irrelevant? Not at all. At the very least, NGO projects such as the rice bank described early in this chapter have provided additional options to those who have few avenues, while helping smooth a transition that can be painful and disruptive in any society. Thailand's transition to modernity has

given rise to supernatural panics such as attacks of "widow ghosts" in Isan (Mills, 1995) and cases of spirit manifestation and possession at the new Bangkok international airport, where local homes have been flooded by run-off from the building site (*Bangkok Post*, 2006). NGOs have succeeded in showing how new forms of cooperation and mobilisation can be achieved by groups who are usually powerless, enabling them to reconceptualise their situations and achieve change. As the vice-headman of the village in Roi Et put it, "before the NGO came, there was no development". When I asked him what this meant he responded that "people didn't cooperate".

However, if community is to manifest itself, there is a need for NGOs to reconsider the forms such a community might take (Shigetomi, 1998). As Reynolds (Chapter 2) points out, the Thai neologism for 'community', *chumchon*, means a grouping of people. This is indeed appropriate for the 'traditional' forms in which sharing of labour was essential in order to overcome labour shortage at key stages in the production cycle. However, as the site of contestation between the haves and have-nots moves from labour to natural resources and the distribution of capital (including human capital, such as educational opportunities), NGOs' conceptions need to encompass some of the English-language connotations of 'community'. These perhaps no longer include 'communist' but still incorporate both 'commune' or 'cooperative', an organisation in which people democratically pool capital, and 'commons', the democratic pooling of land.

In the arena of capital, elite control has been unchallenged during the modern era and has been popularly contested only by nationalist sentiment.[7] 'Civil society' agencies have expressed more concern over whether the capitalist class consists of Thais or foreigners than they have with the processes by which capital is created, invested and distributed. After the financial crisis of 1997, the Thai Rak Thai party functioned as a vehicle for Thai capitalists such as Thaksin to exploit this sentiment and defend themselves from the uncontrolled forces of global capitalism. Thaksin, his party and supporters were publicly hostile to global financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank, going so far as to issue a "declaration of independence" when the crisis loans from the IMF were paid off (Kasian, 2006: 23; Hewison, 2003: 139; Ji, 2003: 29–33). However, Thaksin was no left-wing populist and the popular programs he offered were intended to produce business and entrepreneurship in impoverished areas, deepening the penetration of rural areas by the capitalist mode. Boosting domestic production

and demand through such Keynesian policies offered new markets to domestic industry.

Thai Rak Thai appealed to the rural poor by, among other programs, pursuing an intensive program of rural economic development, creating village credit funds and local enterprise projects. In these programs, it is usually assumed that because the economic programs take place in or are run by 'the community', all members of 'the community' will benefit (Shigetomi, 1998; Arghiros and Moller, 2000). In reality, local elites often capture the profits and the programs encourage the formation of a class of rural capitalists and petty capitalists. These programs do not promote institutions such as credit and industrial cooperatives that may encourage more equal distribution of wealth within Thailand's highly unequal economy. This failure to seriously address inequality was reflected in the fact that rural development programs were not funded by an increase in progressive taxes on income or wealth but by cutting infrastructure spending and squeezing services such as hospitals (Ji, 2003: 33). The cultural hierarchies of wealth and power that perpetuate the inequalities inherited from the semi-Asiatic mode were also left unchallenged. These cultural forms, such as the casting of unequal employer/employee relationships in familial terms or the assumed existence of infinitely elastic rural communities, enable the more efficient and guilt-free squeezing of a migratory proletariat that lacks an effective social-welfare safety net (Ji, 1999).

Issues of natural resource conflict and the potential for the creation of a commons have become steadily more potent as land becomes scarcer and thus a more valuable factor of production. Members of Thailand's ruling classes are currently engaged in rapacious land grabs, real estate speculation and environmental destruction. This is giving rise to what could be called a 'tragedy of the pre-commons', as the commons has barely been defined before being overexploited. In this context, defining, defending and pursuing the rights of 'communities' over natural resources, as was possible under the 1997 constitution, continues to be an important area of struggle, one in which not just the lands but the communities that can be built on them are at stake. For Thailand, the campaign against the Pak Mun Dam in Isan, which gave rise to the wide-ranging Assembly of the Poor, is a classic example of such mobilisation (Missingham, 2003). Other examples of community-centred contests over land include local action against land speculation abetted by official corruption and the seizure of under-utilised land by landless farmers groups (Ratana, 1997; Leonard and Kingkorn, 2003).

Just as 'original communities' could possess legal rights over their common resources under the 1997 constitution, communities may also be recursively defined and created by reference to their commons rather than to the increasingly anachronistic 'traditions' which the rural people of Thailand are leaving behind, along with the NGOs that cling to them. It is not enough to assume simply that a community ethic shaped in response to a particular historical epoch and mode of production can produce communally oriented behaviour under radically changed conditions. Rather than confining rural people to the forms that community has taken in the past, NGOs, academic advocates, state agencies and local residents themselves need to build the forms that community can take in the future.

One such institution, which builds communal values under a capitalist mode and has been successful in other rural development contexts such as rural Spain and Canada, is the credit union or cooperative (MacLeod, 1997; Mathews, 1999). The importance of micro-savings and credit groups is, of course, well understood in development circles, following the success of the Grameen Bank. One of the most successful interventions in the villages in Roi Et discussed earlier was the creation of a women's savings group, which now has deposits of several million baht. However, far less attention has been paid to the governance structures of such micro-finance groups than is warranted. Often they are administered by outside NGO workers or, if not, they distribute decision-making power according to existing power relations (such as Thaksin's one-million-baht village credit funds) or according to the amount of funds deposited (as many savings groups do). Credit unions are explicitly structured as one-depositor, one-vote institutions and thus can contribute to avoiding the class fractionalisation described above.

While a credit union can help to build communities within capitalism at a local level, much more attention also needs to be given to non-local communities. It has become fashionable for allegedly pro-sustainability and pro-sufficiency Thais and others to sneer at the financial choices made by rural Thai people who can get access to credit, claiming that they waste the money on 'motorbikes and mobile phones'. As well as being inequitable — one wonders how well these urban-based and gridlock-bound Thais would get along without *their* mobiles and motorbikes — such attitudes are unconscionable in the light of the huge amounts of research documenting the positive effects better communication and transport links can have for rural people (Bruns, Robert and Chongchit, 1996; ZEF, 2001; Micevska, 2005;

Warr, 2005; Haughton, 2006). Transport and communication are both vital in finding reasonable urban work and avoiding being trapped into exploitative employment. Along with the Internet, mobile phones and other communication and transport technologies are vital in the creation of non-local communities. This is especially important given that a majority of Thais now live in urban areas and many of those in rural areas rely on remittances for their well-being (Anchalee and Associated Press, 2007). In light of the evidence, the 'pro-local' biases of some advocates of sufficiency starts to resemble the attitude of premodern Thai institutions in which rural men were tattooed with the name of their village and lord and whipped if they were found elsewhere.

If moving away from tradition is an accommodation to capitalism, it need not involve capitulating to the homogenising effects of modernity and globalisation as is often feared. Anthropological and cultural research have shown that capitalism is not necessarily destructive of the culture, subjective meaning or individual identity through which people define themselves as groups and communities, although it may reshape them in more explicitly consumerist forms (Rehbein, 2007). Even McDonald's golden arches have taken on different cultural meanings as they have spread across East Asia (Watson, 1997). The economic and ideological changes brought by globalised capitalism can also produce self-consciously nationalist or culturalist movements, to the point of xenophobia. However, studies of the interplay between capitalism and culture have mostly been confined to urban centres. In transitional Thailand, there is a need for more research like that of Mills (1993; 1999b) on the forms a new consciousness of community can take within a capitalist mode of production in rural areas. Such work is also necessary if populist movements are to avoid falling into the trap of xenophobia or becoming politically convenient vehicles for domestic capital. Practical work that builds on this new understanding can then create communities of common interest which find roots beyond ideological fashions for particular institutional forms. One example might be building democratic decision-making mechanisms into village capital sources, so that the processes of capital accumulation that are now creating a rural petty capitalist class are rendered more equitable and accessible.

4

Tai Community and Thai Border Subversions

Nicholas Farrelly

In Thai interpretations of the Tai along the Thailand-Burma frontier, 'community' (*chumchon*) is a key concept articulated at both village and transnational levels. Its symbolic power has been deployed to localise and regionalise particular — and particularistic — visions of Tai life. In this academic and activist endeavour, the Shan, a Tai group living in both Burma and Thailand, have attracted considerable attention.[1] In the context of these explorations of Shan life, this chapter will critically examine modern Thai formulations of community in mainland Southeast Asia.

The southernmost parts of 'traditional' Shan settlement are found in the valleys of the Thailand-Burma border zone. In this region the Shan straddle the border at the frontier of the Burmese and Thai nation-states as a politically disenfranchised and marginalised group. While they are a valley-dwelling majority in some border districts of the Thai provinces of Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son, and also in the adjacent Shan State of Burma, they constitute a minority within the two national polities. Inside Burma, Shan armies have fought the government for decades and in areas along the Thailand-Burma border their rebellions are ongoing. The resulting instability and lack of economic and political opportunities have prompted countless Shan to migrate to Thailand, where they have few, if any, rights and where they inhabit largely unregulated corners of the economy.[2]

In this chapter I initially step back from this history to examine how Thai academics interpret the Shan who live along their country's northern frontier.[3] In particular, I explore the meanings and interpretations of Shan community. The analysis begins by examining descriptions of the Shan within what I call the Tai studies project.[4] This Thai academic undertaking seeks to clarify the similarities and cultural genealogies of the Tai throughout Southeast Asia. I show that Tai communities, particularly village communities in rural areas, are an enduring discursive preoccupation for scholarly contributors to this project.

This general discussion leads to a detailed description of the first level — the local level — at which Thai academics describe Tai communities. I outline some of the key Thai interpretations of the Shan village that have been published over the past three decades. Drawing on the perceived 'authenticity' of the Shan village community, many contributions to the Tai studies project present Shan life from a perspective that emphasises premodern, ecologically benevolent and socially benign elements. The image of Shan community that emerges is part of a more general critique of what many Thai academics identify as the excesses of Thai modernity.

However, Tai community is not merely a tool for reflecting on traditional and modern life; it is also used to underpin a broader set of interpretations at the regional level. At this second and more abstract level, local Shan communities are used to support a discursive subversion of the Thailand-Burma border. The legitimacy of the Tai studies project's greater Tai community is built on authentic local communities that subvert nation-state demarcations. Such communities justify a range of claims about a borderless and transnational Tai realm. By emphasising ethnic and cultural affinities, this regional Tai community is constructed to undermine the modern national boundary. Throughout the Thailand-Burma border region, it is this subversive anti-modernist discourse that encompasses the Shan within the T(h)ai cultural and political realm. The deliberately ambiguous term 'T(h)ai' is used throughout this chapter to emphasise the lack of distinction between 'Tai' and 'Thai' that is so often present in Thai accounts of the Shan.

What are the implications of this symbolic construction of local and regional community for the Shan themselves? I propose that the discursive inclusion and homogenisation of the Shan in this T(h)ai realm overlooks some of the more pressing realities of Shan life along the Thailand-Burma border and elsewhere. A more realistic engagement

with modernity and its contradictions could help to bolster the Tai studies project and its effort to understand the diversity of peoples living in mainland Southeast Asia.

THE TAI STUDIES PROJECT: A 'RELATIVE SEEKING' MOVEMENT

Compared to its neighbours, Burma and Laos, Thailand has over the past three decades enjoyed a period of economic prosperity. With growing wealth and influence, many Thais have looked across their borders, and further afield to southern China, for regional opportunities. The Economic Quadrangle (which includes Thailand, Laos, Burma and Yunnan), and a plethora of other initiatives in what the Asian Development Bank likes to call the Greater Mekong Sub-region, have given an international outlook to much of Thai policy and development activity. Improvements to transport infrastructure, reforms of trading conditions and the liberalisation of visa arrangements have supported the resulting proliferation of trans-regional links. It is in this context that Thai academics have cultivated their Tai studies project.

Looking beyond Thailand, Thai academics have focused attention on the people they categorise as Tai.[5] As a cultural and linguistic 'family', the Tai constitute a large proportion of the population in a broad, transnational arc stretching across mainland Southeast Asia. The genesis of the Tai studies project is the assertion that "the people who call themselves 'Tai' or 'Thai' ... are spread outside the Kingdom of Thailand as well" (Suchit, 1985: 19). From the Thai perspective:

> [the] Dai or Tai ethnic family does not only live within Thailand. They are spread throughout northern Vietnam, southern China, Laos and Myanmar. The total number of people is more than 90 million according to a report by the Australian Anthropological Institute (Teeraparp, 1994: 8).[6]

Originating from the recognition of a linguistic 'family', it is commonly argued that the Tai peoples share "collective cultural characteristics of language, beliefs ... food and eating, and their lifestyle connected to rice culture" (Siraphon, 2002: 3). Explaining the closeness of this family was the purpose of Teeraparp's study of *The Tai in Southeast Asia*. He wanted to make people in Thailand understand that "being indignant with the Shan who are fighting with the dictatorial government of Burma along the Chiang Rai border ... is the same as getting angry with

our own relatives" (Teeraparp, 1994: 10). For Teeraparp, maintaining and developing the relationships between the members of this "Tai family" is essential. The prevailing challenge is to make the Thai understand "that there are many different Tai siblings living in other lands".

The existence of these disparate "siblings" prompted Suchit Wongthes (1985: 21) to ask "what is the benefit of these (Tai) studies?". His answer is revealing. Suchit indicates that he began studying the Tai so that "future Thai generations will know more about their 'relatives' in India, Burma, China, Laos and elsewhere" (1985: 21). Narimon (1988) takes that stance one step further and argues that:

> Other people, other nations cannot overlook the importance of the Tai and will study them for many reasons. Thus it is not proper for us to do nothing; from now on more and more things will be discovered. Through all this, at the very least, we will always be proud that a land stands as the Tai nation. The only disappointment is that we could have united as a bigger Kingdom than we currently enjoy.

It is thus not surprising, following Narimon (1988: 62), that the Tai studies project has also been given the rather clumsy title of "relative seeking movement" (*krabuan kansuebha yat*).

To facilitate the Tai studies project there have been a number of major research series. These include the Comparative Research on the Cultures and Societies of Tai-Speaking Groups in Northern Thailand, Shan State of Burma and Assam State of India Project, the Project on Tai Social and Cultural History, and various others originating from the *Art and Culture* stable. Many of the key contributors to the Tai studies project have been featured in the monthly journal *Art and Culture*, which is a lavishly illustrated and diligently constructed celebration of Thai culture and history. Now in its 29th year of publication, it has been a regular forum for articles on Tai groups including the Shan. The long-time editor of *Art and Culture*, archaeologist Suchit Wongthes, is prominent in various aspects of the Tai studies project.

While it is clearly an expansive undertaking, the scope of the Tai studies project output is difficult to quantify accurately. There is no question, however, that in total the Tai studies project of the past three decades has produced many hundreds of scholarly works on history, language and culture in mainland Southeast Asia. With titles like *The Restoration of Tai Ahom Language, Beliefs and Ceremonies in Assam State, India* (Sumit and Damrong, 2003), *The Ethnic Tai in*

Chronicles (Siraphon, 2002), *History of Community Culture and the Tai Ethnene* (Chatthip, 1997) and *The Tai Way: A Way to Self-Reliant Communities* (Suwat, 2002), there is no shortage of Thai interest in the Tai and a particular vision of their lives in which ethnicity and community feature prominently.

The vastness of the Tai studies project has led to a degree of self-reflection about its achievements and future. A detailed chronology of developments in the project was produced by one of the most prominent Thai scholars of the Shan, Sompong Witayasakpan (2000). He divides the Tai studies project into distinct periods centred, in chronological order, on "nationalism" (*chat niyom*), "finding answers in the village" (*ha kham torb thi muban*) and then "globalisation" (*lokapiwat*), each reflecting the popular outlook of the era. Nowadays, representing the current theoretical paradigm which privileges local and counter-hegemonic distillations, the emphasis is on "doing research at the community [level]" (Sompong, 2000: 57). It is with satisfaction that Sompong (2000: 56) notes how in recent years the Tai studies project includes "not only Thai academics but also local academics from Assam, China and Vietnam". According to Sompong (2000: 76), "studies used to come from the perspective of the upper class, the rulers or the academics with state backing. Now it is academics of the people: ordinary people who have become local philosophers." Such locally embedded research is, according to Sompong (2000: 76), a way to help "build independent villages and communities". The resulting villages should, in his view, be "self-reliant" and "strong communities".

Chatthip Nartsupha, a long-time leader in the Tai studies project, gives a slightly different but even more robust explanation for his interest in studying the Tai. He suggests that Thai academics need to study Tai cultures to "better understand the rural Thai culture of Thailand" (Chatthip, 1997: 80). Chatthip posits that understanding the geographically distant (that is, the Tai) gives people in Thailand an opportunity to reconnect with what he sees as their T(h)ai culture. This vision is most fully enunciated in the project statement of the Project on Tai Social and Cultural History:

> In Thailand we are now becoming more confident in our own social institutions and culture; meaning village community and village culture. Tai communities and culture have a long history intertwined with the culture of what is currently southern China. This is a self-identity which endures across time. Half of Thailand's people live in village communities. Thailand is now going back

> to the countryside for the sustainable development of rural areas. To ward off the capitalist system and to battle today's economic arrangements, we should clearly understand the full benefit of the institution of communities and the culture of communities. Village communities and the culture of communities are central to uniting the spirit for local development and national development.[7]

For Chatthip, there are premodern Tai lifestyles waiting to be rediscovered in places where rural communities have not been forced into inequitable (capitalist) exchanges with other parts of society. Teeraparp (1994: 9) clarifies this thinking by explaining that "we [Thai people today] watch Hollywood films, barrack for Premier League Soccer and follow the news on CNN. There is nothing wrong with that, however there is a problem if we do not know our own roots."[8] Those roots are vested with a pre-capitalist and premodern legitimacy. Wijarn Parnich (2001: 11) takes this desire to find T(h)ai society's roots one step further by arguing that studies of the Tai "help to create awareness amongst the Thai about our collective social and community identity. Our society stands secure because it has such deep roots." Those roots are traced back to the Shan and to other Tai groups who live outside the Thai mainstream. The search for Tai roots among Shan communities is one part of the wider Tai studies agenda to rediscover the essence of Tai life.

SHAN VILLAGE COMMUNITY

Thai academics have long looked for their cultural roots among the Shan and particularly in what they call 'Shan village communities'. This preoccupation with local Tai community prioritises a particular interpretation of village life and provides the basis for constructing an image of the Tai that challenges the legitimacy of nation-states and their borders in modern Southeast Asia.[9]

Authentic Community

Like many of their colleagues, Sompong Witayasakpan (2001: 9) and Chatthip Nartsupha (2000) take the general Tai studies project preoccupations with premodern Tai life and apply it to what they call "Shan community" (*chumchon tai yai*). Chatthip (2000: 18) has used the idea of Shan community to argue that:

> Shan culture is similar on a foundational level to the culture of the Tai in other areas. As such there is a village community which is the basic element of the society. They live on the lowlands near rivers or between mountains, plant rice as their staple crop ....

In such Thai interpretations, Shan culture and community are indivisible and as a consequence, T(h)ai culture and community are seen to become similarly joined. As Ganya Lilarlai (1997: 7) has emphasised, Chatthip sees "community culture" as contributing to "nationalism by villagers and not the state". This is a version of nationalism in which local cultures seek to re-assert their position against the supposed hegemony of the state apparatus. In this way, culture and community go hand in hand to cultivate a "Thai awareness that they are part of the Tai".

This combination of culture and community supports, in some Thai interpretations, the Shan village as a model of collective, harmonious and primordial life: a "Shan community society" (*sangkom chumchon tai yai*) (Sompong, 2001: 444). Described in terms of self-sufficiency and environmental benevolence, a romantic and pristine image of Shan village history is presented. Sompong (2001: 8) writes:

> ... the life of the Shan is intertwined with the paddy field. They plant rice and plant vegetables, beans, tobacco, watermelons and other annual crops. Life is regulated by the seasons. They set the pattern of life: work, ceremonies and religious customs throughout the year.

And according to Saysom Tamti (1995: 5):

> At first when the Shan came to the various places they survived by getting their food from the forest. When they became familiar with nearby communities they would go and work as wage labourers in their fields or paddy ... receiving rice, seeds or ... establishing their own agriculture. They planted rice as a staple and planted other crops like soybeans, garlic, red onions, tomatoes and other vegetables to eat within their families. There was no trading because everybody planted and ate the same.

Such descriptions of Shan lifestyle hark back to an imagined time when Thai life was similarly structured. Thailand's increasingly commercialised agriculture has rapidly moved away from this type of 'authentic' pattern. Rice culture clearly remains an important part of Thailand's culture but the particular simplicity and seasonality of this description

of the Shan is found to be generally lacking in modern Thai agriculture. Arguably only in Thailand's poorest districts, including some of the places where the Shan live on the northern border, are the remnants of this subsistence system still a large part of the local economy.

It is not just the traditional Shan economy that is part of the Tai studies project's reminiscence: the Shan, in contrast to their Thai 'siblings', are seen to be preserving many other aspects of their 'authentic' (*dang derm*) rural culture. The term *dang derm*, which can be translated as 'authentic', 'original' or 'as it was' — is an important component of the Tai studies project's community discourse. It specifies indigenous tradition and an uninterrupted connection to 'old ways'. Ranoo Wichasin's (1998) discussion of the Shan in the Shan State is a classic description of authentic Shan life. Its focus is on material culture, traditional livelihood, ceremonies and natural ecology. Many accounts in the book begin with *tae derm*, which means 'originally'. Ranoo notes the "wealth of natural resources" (*ramruay laeng sapayakon thamachat*) in both agriculture and forests. She enthuses that traditional irrigation systems are supplemented by "manure" (*puey dok*) and "compost" (*puey mak*). Beyond agricultural production, there is "handicraft production within the household" (Ranoo, 1998: 273). The picture of Shan life that Ranoo paints is one that is familiar to many people in Thailand. It is a popular image of the Thai countryside before the emergence of state and market hegemony.

The Benign Tai Village

In the Tai studies project, the Shan village is used as a site for developing ideas about ideal Tai social formations that fit current preoccupations. For this reason, Yos Santasombat (2001: 158–9) emphasises the Shan village as a place of minimal ecological destruction or impact.

> A small rice-producing peasant community, with customs and traditions emanating from dialectical relationships between rice and man within the ecological niche of the river valley ... these peasant communities have been able to support themselves economically without very intricate production other than to clear the forest into rice fields.

According to Sompong Witayasakpan's description (2001: 438), "Shan communities are communities where there are close interactions. There is mutual cooperation and generosity." Sompong (2001: 441) elaborates

on this idyllic picture of the Shan village by emphasising abundance and subsistence:

> A Shan village community is characterised by being a village of plenty. There is a subsistence economy. There is very little trade within the village ... but there is always communication within the village as people are neighbours.

This local and harmonious social grouping seems to appeal to both Sompong and Yos and their visions of Tai economics and priorities. The tranquil and contented character of Shan life is reinforced when Sompong allows the Shan to interpret themselves. He notes that "the Shan see themselves as a peace-loving people" (Sompong, 2001: 443). This tranquillity is often described in terms of Shan religious ceremonies and traditional beliefs. According to Teeraparp (1994: 112), "the cultural practices of the Shan identity emerge from their Buddhist activities". Through illustrations of Shan religious activities and in pictures of their Theravada Buddhist temples, Teeraparp emphasises this point about the peacefulness of Shan village life.

The tranquillity of Shan village life is elaborated in one village study by Nongnutch Chandrabhai and Ranoo Wichasin (1998). In this study there are descriptions of traditional healing (*prapheni kanraksa payaban*) and ceremonies to pay respect to elders (*prapheni ganto*) (Nongnutch and Ranoo, 1998: 326, 328).[10] The authentic character of these traditions is highlighted in an account of "produce ceremonies" (*prapheni pheua kanphalit*). According to the description, "the relationship between humans and nature is often found in agricultural production customs because in such systems of production humans must continually live with nature" (Nongnutch and Ranoo, 1998: 347). In the Tai studies project, the Shan village is presented as a benign idyll, in which persistent customs underpin harmonious social and environmental relationships.

Change and Continuity

Such descriptions of local Shan life are sometimes framed as a rejection of outside influence in favour of preserving community stability. Sompong (2001: 440) suggests that "the society of a Shan community is a very closed society". This closed society is based on religious piety, geographic isolation and traditional social mores. The implication is that other people — outsiders — disrupt the peace of the Shan village.

With its "original traditions" (*prapheni dang derm*), the Shan village community is presented as a consistent and enduring (*pen wela cha nan*) place (Sompong, 2001: 435). Outside influence is unwelcome.

Notwithstanding this picture of the tranquil and isolated Shan village, in some interpretations the Shan village is described as having been changed by outside influences. Colonialism, capitalism and the state are the most regularly cited culprits. These changes mean, for example, that "the villagers know how to use chemical fertilisers and other agricultural chemicals which have started to change their livelihoods" (Saysom, 1995: 5). In such descriptions of agricultural change, the changes to Shan livelihood come from external forces, not from the agency or aspirations of individuals or groups. Chatthip Nartsupha (2001b: 17) describes the economy of the village as only reluctantly engaging with the market when forced: "[the villagers] only trade when they need to get more to have enough". He also argues that Shan "community and society were independent... the state was not important for the maintenance of the community" (Chatthip, 2001b: 16). Authentic Shan community is constructed in terms of its relative isolation from outside commercial or political influence.

* * *

Issues of environmental sustainability, social justice and economic equity are one explanation for the rise of the Tai studies project's anti-modernist dissent. Disillusioned with the outcomes of their modernity and development, the Thai critics promote a return to Tai community values. Although their protest originates from Thailand's cities and particularly the academic and NGO centres of Bangkok and Chiang Mai, they look for their meaning in villages and among mainland Southeast Asia's marginalised peoples like the Shan. With rural development activists and Thailand's anthropologists showing the way, the dissenting chorus is nostalgic for past simplicities and comforts. Their proposed return to the values of the village is important for it signals an attempted renaissance of the periphery. This is a key anti-modernist goal of the Tai studies project, which leads into another, closely related ambition: to challenge the modern nation-state and the borders that define its power.

BORDERS AND TAI COMMUNITY

This idea of local Shan community has been particularly invigorated by a Thai academic desire to challenge the legitimacy of the Thailand-

Burma border. To understand this Thai interpretative challenge, it is necessary to consider the border from a Thai perspective. According to Siripon's (2003: 2) study of territorialisation and the Thailand-Burma border, "the border means a line between nations/countries or between two localities in geography. The role of the border is to demarcate the area of one people to one zone, by ordering and controlling. The border is thus a line that demonstrates ownership." From this starting point, many Thai academics have attempted to study this process of nation-state demarcation and regulation.

Perhaps the most famous example of Thai border research is Thongchai Winichakul's *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*. It argues that there is a geographic logic to Thailand's history: that modern spatial knowledge was used to create a "geo-body". This knowledge emphasised demarcation, exclusion and the bounded shape of the nation. According to Thongchai (1994: 129), in the triumph of this new logic, the "ultimate loser was the indigenous knowledge of political space. Modern geography displaced it, and the regime of mapping became hegemonic."

Thongchai's argument is regularly cited by Thai scholars. Pinkaew Laungaramsri (2002: 6) describes *Siam Mapped*, from the perspective of Thai social scientists, as "an historical work which has influenced how we see place, borders, and the nation". In 2002, the journal *Sociology*, which is produced by Chiang Mai University's Faculty of Social Science, published a large collection of mostly Thai writings concerning the issue of "transborders". Covering what are called border "problems" and "theories", it attempts to explain the "construction of borders" with a critical and counter-hegemonic approach. Pinkaew introduces the edition as challenging the idea that nation-state borders delineate cultural and social identity. She wants to undermine "the belief that the similarity of people in a society (or a nation) and their difference with people from another society (or nation) is determined by their place ... inside and outside the borderline" (Pinkaew, 2002: 2). Taking this argument one step further, Parida Ratanaparit (2002: 19) comments:

> Over the past 10 years, I have observed a number of sociological studies examining border-ness become characterised by their increasing specificity and rigidity. The research examines movements of people and, in particular, interprets transborder as something novel: as something which was not present in the past.

For Parida, understanding the border requires asking and answering questions without this rigid thinking. She wants to examine the border

as a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon. "Where does the border come from? How was it made and how can it be made to disappear?" (Parida 2002: 42). In searching for that 'off' button, Parida remains defiantly critical of borders and bordering. Her purpose is to eradicate the border, to "make it disappear". The questions that Parida proposes demonstrate the discontent among some Thai academics with the machinery and philosophy of borders. Her interrogation is part of a wider challenge to the homogenising, hegemonic and centralising nature of borders and the states that control them. Thai interpretations of the Shan serve a useful purpose in this endeavour.

The Shan in a Regional Tai Community

> We are born into a world riven by factions. If we want to live together, we have to get rid of these factions. (Witun, 1992: 17)

Challenging the nation-state's power to demarcate and regulate a line of control and to establish a bounded domain of exclusive sovereignty is an important part of the Tai studies project's engagement with the Shan. Thai interpretations seek to replace the idea of a national border with an authentic, ethnic unity among the Tai. In response to the border's facilitation of control and exclusion, Thai academics and activists selectively emphasise transborder and transnational linkages.

To begin the subversion of the border, a premodern vision of geography is established. According to Sompong (2001: 434), "in the valleys between the mountains ... the Shan built their village communities over 2000 years ago". Here, the Shan are associated with a particular ecological zone, rather than with an exclusive political territory. Teeraparp (1994: 112) and others assert that "at the border between the Shan State and Lanna Thai, there was no clear division in the past".[11] The artificial division occurred when Thailand was forced by external pressure to demarcate a border. The border now divides the similar populations of Shan and Thai in an arbitrary fashion.

To help undermine the border, Thai academics and activists use understandings from the Tai studies project to redefine its significance. The cultural similarity between the Shan and the Thai is used to argue for the cultural irrelevance of the border. The fact that the Shan and Thai share a particular type of authentic local community is a key element in the assertion of this regional transborder community. Such arguments are reinforced, in Pisan Pongsawatdee's (2003) terms, with

concepts like "border communities" (*chumchon chaidaen*). Rather than being a community that has fallen under state control, the border community's legitimacy exists separately from the state and its regulations. There are variations on this idea including *chumchon kham phromdaen*, a term that Siripon (2003) translates as "transnational community". A more literal and accurate translation is probably 'cross-border community' or perhaps 'trans-frontier community'. The assertion is that these communities cross the national boundary and are not constrained by national demarcations.

Some Thai academics further develop their ideas about communities without borders through the concept of *muang chaidaen* (border towns). These towns, like Mae Sai in Chiang Rai Province and Mae Sod in Tak Province, are part of the Thai academic subversion of the Thailand-Burma border. Mae Sai has been called a "Shan cross-border community". According to Pisan Pongsawatdee (2003: 21):

> the town of Mae Sai is next to the border and cross-border bridge. ... Mae Sai is characterised by the cultural affinity between the people on both sides of the river ... this is because the Shan and the Northern Thai speak the same language and look similar (for the ears and eyes of somebody from Bangkok, like myself).

For Pisan, this is a border community, united by T(h)ai culture. The culture of the border shows, for Pisan, that the nation-state's border can be subverted by local people through their patterns of work, trade and culture. He sees "the problem of the border as something new", an imposition (Pisan, 2003: 5).

With a delegitimised border, there is room to assert a united border culture. This is not surprising because those who argue against the nation-state's border often argue for some other type of unity. Tanet Charoenmuang (1994: 227) has developed a conceptualisation of "border culture". By this he means "the local culture that is in the area of a border of the state. Such border culture is really just one kind of local culture." What characterises border culture is its linkages across the national frontier and beyond the interest (or even the knowledge) of the state. For example, in border areas of the Economic Quadrangle, many family ties cross the frontier to help maintain strong local community connections. Such cross-border ties also assist trade and migration. Tanet's argument about border culture becomes more emphatic when lamenting its potential replacement with other cultures such as national culture and global culture (Tanet, 1994: 235). The subversion of

the border is, in Tanet's case, in direct opposition to the nationalisation and globalisation of what he sees as local.

This effort of discursive subversion relies for its power on selectively making distinctions that are not based on the nation-state border. In relation to the settlement of Piang Luang in the far north of Chiang Mai Province, Wandee Santiwutamet (2002: 244), for example, claims that the "ethnicity of the ... Shan is an intensively constructed awareness. The Shan of Piang Luang have chosen their identifications including language, religion, dress ... to differentiate themselves from other ethnicities." To underline this point, she describes how "their identity has a relationship with the political situation between the Shan National Army and the Myanmar government" (Wandee, 2002: 245). This relationship is clearest at a cultural level: the Shan specify their cultural distance from their "enemy", the Burmese, while asserting an affinity with the "language, religion [and] dress" of the Thai. From Wandee's perspective, the nation-state boundary should be subverted but the perceived ethnic boundary between the Burmese and the Shan needs to be maintained and reinforced.

This selective subversion of borders gives ballast to a core misgiving of the Tai studies project: that nation-state (*rat chat*) boundaries do not align with the boundaries of nations (*chat*) nor, in particular, with the boundary of the Tai nation. This is crucial to how Thai writings about the Thailand-Burma border should be understood. The nation, encompassing the Tai community, does not, in this logic, align with the boundaries of Thailand's nation-state, with its geo-body. The same can be said for the other nation-states and nations of the region. The Shan ethnic boundary is thus used to define a Tai realm that stretches beyond the national border. Capitalising on the cultural affinity that the Thai reflect onto their Tai siblings, the selective application of demarcation helps project Thai influence into a 'Tai community', defined by the Tai studies project, that subverts the border of the Thai nation-state. A key element in this symbolic construction of the regional Tai community is the image of local Tai community which is shared by both the Shan and, in their imaginings of the past, the Thai.

SHAN LIVELIHOOD IN MODERN THAILAND

This discursive subversion of the Thailand-Burma border is found in Tai studies project contributions about the Shan that focus on the authenticity of Shan communities in rural and relatively remote areas.

This is curious because throughout the border provinces the Shan are "everywhere and everyone" and "not just in villages", as one Chiang Rai–based service station worker told me. Countless Shan now live in Thai industrial developments, towns and cities as part of the lowliest and least remunerated section of the labour force. Their temporary and often ramshackle accommodation is a feature of many agricultural and industrial landscapes. They are not hard to find — Shan work in hotels, in orchards, as bricklayers, on farms, in factories and as prostitutes — and Thailand needs these workers. A NGO publication titled *Taking Shelter Under Trees* quotes one Shan villager who sums up the situation: "If we are pushed back by the Thai authorities, the farm owners will also lose. They won't be able to find other labourers. Thai labourers don't want to handle the chemicals and carry the heavy loads" (Gallasch, 2001: 64). So while Thai interpretations emphasise primordial Shan communities, the Shan are, in fact, living and working in the engine rooms of Thai modernity, industry and commerce. This is particularly the case in northern Thailand and its border districts.

The pivotal problem in many Thai studies of the Shan is a selective and simplified vision of 'work'. Traditional agricultural production certainly no longer captures the full range of Shan labour, if it ever did. As of June 2004, for about 12,000 baht (about US$300) almost any Shan could be smuggled into Thailand from deep in the Shan State and then onwards to Bangkok.[12] It is a risky venture but is also seen to offer opportunities for lucrative employment. Having few job prospects in their hometowns and districts back in the Shan State, this is a very popular option for young Shan. Once in Thailand, these Shan workers are not organised in self-sufficient and harmonious community collectives. They live much as the Thai working class lives and make do as best they can.

For Shan migrant workers, even after repeated crackdowns and with the permanent threat of deportation, Thailand remains an attractive proposition. One of my Shan informants, who worked for many years at a prawn farm in eastern Thailand and now lives in a Burmese town near the border, told me:

> I've been arrested and deported twice. Everybody gets arrested, these days it's inevitable. Without papers, living in Thailand is becoming harder and harder. There are so many checkpoints to catch us but many Shan still want to go. What else can we do? There is no work here.

Figure 4.1 Two generations of a family in the Shan State that have returned from work in Thailand.

Depressed economic conditions and a stifling and uncertain political situation do little to keep the Shan in Burma.

As a consequence, there are now Shan workers in Thailand in the most unexpected places, doing the most unexpected things. One young Shan informant used to cook pizzas in upmarket foreigner-friendly restaurants in a southern Thai city. He complained that he was paid too little compared to the other staff and was always worried about being arrested. He did, however, say that if there was ever demand for pizzas back in his hometown in the Shan State, he could be counted on to open a little restaurant and fire up a pizza oven. Of course, many other Shan workers are doing more predictable activities. In one mountainous district of Chiang Mai Province where I have done research, it is Shan workers who lay concrete for new roads, make up the work teams for construction contracts, pick flowers in the plastic-covered greenhouses and spray pesticides on the strawberry fields. They are paid two-thirds what a Thai citizen can expect for this type of labour and are forced to make do. Throughout Thailand, the anonymous, lowly paid servants of

industry, commerce and crime will often proclaim their Shan origins without too much probing. They are everywhere.

Currently, one of the most prominent groups of Shan workers in Thailand are the girls who work as prostitutes and risk their health in Chiang Mai, Bangkok, Hat Yai and elsewhere. In some large villages that I have visited in the Shan State, people say that four years ago so many of the returning girls died of AIDS that there are few Shan women left to marry. The existence and labour of all these Shan workers should prompt some reconsideration of the Thai conception of authentic Shan local communities. Without this there is a real danger that the many Shan in Thailand will be rendered both invisible and illegitimate by an idealised discourse that undermines their claims for more rights within the Thai nation-state.

Such reconsideration could begin by actually asking the Shan what they think about their Tai-ness and the role of the Thailand-Burma border. Many Shan cross the border everyday but their perspectives on 'transborders' have never, to my knowledge, been integrated into the Tai studies project. In my experience, many Shan cross the border and rely on it for their protection and survival. I was once informed by an elderly Shan man living in a border village that "the Thai side was heaven" and the "Burmese side was hell". He said that without the Thai soldiers stationed just outside his village, they would have "disappeared a long time ago". He was very happy that he had made the journey, some 30 years before, to the relative comfort, prosperity and hospitality on the Thai side of the border. As in Walker's (1999) exposition of border trade between Laos and Thailand, many of the people most affected by the border have the least to gain from subverting it.

Chiang Mai's border district of Wiang Haeng provides, via Wandee (2002: 227), a particularly striking example of this phenomenon. According to her description:

> Fa Wiang In Temple was once the centre for religious ceremonies for the Shan on both sides. The village of Piang Luang and the villages in the border districts of the Shan State were then divided into two separate parts... after the Burmese soldiers set up base in the other half of the temple the villagers did not dare to make merit because they were scared of the Burmese soldiers.

That temple is now completely divided, with a Thai Army encampment on one side and a Burmese Army base on the other. The line of demarcation is heavily fortified and the situation at Piang Luang has been

Figure 4.2 A Thai soldier watching the Thailand-Burma border in Chiang Mai Province.

marked by protracted, low-level conflict. The potential and reality of such armed conflict influences all activity throughout the border region.

At Piang Luang and other Shan settlements, it is Thai Army and paramilitary units that protect Shan refugees from nearby Wa and Burmese garrisons.[13] Behind that protective barrier, in recent years the Shan on the Thai side of the border have been the beneficiaries of Thailand's relative security and prosperity. While life at the bottom in Thailand can be difficult, it is not nearly as dangerous or as unpredictable as life in the Shan State. On the Burmese side of the frontier, the Shan and other non-Burmese groups have suffered greatly. In the Shan State, the widespread use of forced labour, the use of rape as a weapon of war and many other human rights abuses have been thoroughly documented (Amnesty International, 2000; Shan Human Rights Foundation, 2002; 2003; 2007). What this suggests is that the Shan who do make it to the Thailand-Burma border use the demarcation for their welfare and security and have made no attempt to subvert it. Wishing away the border could lead to dramatic and disastrous consequences.

SPECULATIVE ENGAGEMENTS WITH MODERNITY

The Thai discourse on transborder Tai community generally ignores the reality that, in many Shan settlements, the border is not an abstract geopolitical imposition. It is a daily reality that soldiers, checkpoints and customs officers control the line of demarcation. Within the Shan State itself, there are internal demarcations between government- and rebel-held areas and stringent controls on the movement of goods and people.

What has also been ignored is that Shan communities in all their diversity have their own battles that have little to do with the Thai academic preoccupation with local community culture and subverting the nation-state border. Real battles are still being fought. During my visits to the Shan State, aspirations to a peaceful and prosperous family life were, unsurprisingly, the most common responses to my enquiries about what people wanted for the future. They also wanted diverse employment and educational opportunities for their children. The challenge for the Tai studies project, and all who study Tai-lands, should be to provide discursive backing to such Tai aspirations and ideals, not simply to impose their own strategic interpretations. Constructions of community can contribute to marginalisation, disempowerment and silencing as well as to nobler political objectives.

Living in contested, militarised or uncertain areas, the Shan cannot be divorced from their jumbled and speculative engagement with Southeast Asian modernity, conflict and economics. In their case, that means the border between Thailand and Burma cannot be wished away. The border has political and cultural salience and is now part of everyday life for many individuals, families and communities seeking personal safety and livelihood security. The authentic communities prescribed in Thai interpretations do not help to legitimise Shan claims for work, citizenship and human rights precisely because so much effort has been devoted to rediscovering an essence of T(h)ai-ness for the Thai.

This project of rediscovery has other regional implications. While the subversion of the Thailand-Burma border generally leaves the rest of Burma unaffected, the same cannot be said for Laos. Efforts to include the Tai peoples of Laos in this descriptive project potentially threaten the core of the Lao nation-state. In political and cultural terms, the repercussions of such efforts could be profound. As the only other Tai-dominated nation-state in Southeast Asia, Laos is, arguably, most vulnerable to any expansionist cultural and discursive projects

undertaken by Thai scholars. On their side, Lao wariness about the influence of Thai popular culture and economic power is one manifestation of a generally sceptical response to the Thai role in the region. For Laos, any efforts to present the national culture with a pan-T(h)ai hue could become a threat to today's geopolitical configuration. New waves of Tai studies scholars looking to study regional Tai community may want to take account of the risks of reinforcing any politicised 'T(h)ai' agenda. Those latent risks are reason enough for developing critical understandings of pan-Tai community in all its forms.

No doubt, various notions of premodern community are part of the heritage of all Tai people but it does not follow that, under modern conditions, these communities represent the only legitimate form of sociality. Nor does it follow that the symbolism of traditional community is salient or empowering for people struggling under uncertain political and economic conditions. The Shan are now part of modernising agendas on both sides of the Thailand-Burma frontier. An acceptance of that reality and openness to more diverse imaginings of modern community will help to strengthen the Tai studies project and its mandate of better understanding T(h)ai life throughout mainland Southeast Asia.

Part II
Local Networks

5

The Spirit of Community: Puta Belief and Communal Sentiments in Southern Laos

Holly High

"A social relationship will be called 'communal' (*Vergemeinschaftung*) if and so far as the orientation of social action ... is based on a subjective feeling of the parties, whether affectual or traditional, that they belong together" (Weber, 1978: 40). These words were penned by Max Weber at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the later half of that century, 'community' became a key category for thinking about social organisation in the Tai lands and internationally and it continues to hold sway today. Despite an often controversial past, the notion of community offers important insights into how social relationships are created, experienced and maintained, especially when understood in Weber's terms as a sentiment of belonging. Such insights are best attained by employing the community concept as an open question rather than a set of pre-packaged answers and by investigating community as a form of action rather than as an object. The question of community involves asking how sentiments of belonging are forged and maintained in constantly rearticulated political, economic and social arrangements.

This chapter applies the question of community to a specific event: a ritual in the south of Laos known as 'the feasting of the *puta*'. The *puta* is a supernatural being that presides over a village or group of households. During the feasting ritual, each household in its jurisdiction

prepares an offering for this being. Together, these offerings are said to represent the "children of the village": this is a ritual of belonging.[1] Analysis of these offerings illustrates that this sense of belonging relates to the political, economic and social conditions of the south of Laos, past and present. Migrations and disruptions due to border agreements, war, food shortages and wage labour have not eroded communal sentiments but have been incorporated into understandings of them. Today, people in the south of Laos enact networks of belonging that include mobile and distant members, while members incorporate in themselves histories of mobility and disjuncture. What might seem like a 'traditional' expression of a 'community' turns out to be symbolic work that grapples with modern problems of disruption and mobility. Community, thus, emerges as robust in the modern context.

But is community an appropriate tool for state intervention? Recent poverty reduction policies in Laos have designated the village community as the 'implementing body' for government policy. The communal sentiments expressed in the puta cult suggests that community is important for poverty reduction, though not in the ways or forms that the state promotes or expects.

COMMUNITY AS AN ACTIVITY

There is a rich body of literature that defines the traditional Tai community as rural, self-sufficient and cooperative. In this genre, community is a short-hand term used to evoke that which was only just lost, only recently corrupted by modernity, or only just visible in exotic living relics and possibly on the verge of extinction. This approach resonates with the broader romantic tendency across the social sciences, where community has held a privileged association with ideas about the rural, the tribal, the traditional and the Third World, especially insofar as these are assumed to be bearers of authenticity, antithetical to modernity — by virtue of being classed as 'not modern' it is assumed that such people must also have 'community'. Such use of the community concept has been heavily criticised as part of a misleading 'othering'. Joseph, for instance, argues that romantic ideas about community "answer all the important questions before they have even been asked" (Joseph, 2002: 1).

However, uses of the community concept are not limited to romantic imaginings of the past and the traditional. The insight that

some communities are 'imagined' has been applied to a diverse range of modern-day contexts including the nation-state (Anderson, 1991), Internet communities and transnational communities of migrants and cosmopolitans. So pervasive is this notion that one commentator noted wryly, "It seems that every diaspora is a community whether it likes it or not" (Hage, 2005: 467). The notion of community is so widely employed, so flexible in meaning and so resilient to criticism that it has been argued that, rather than destroying community, modern capitalism in fact creates and necessitates it. Joseph (2002) argues that community can supplement, facilitate or shore up capital, but also that capital plays an important part in how communities are made possible, performed and identified.

Community plays an important role in the imaginings of economic growth and poverty reduction in contemporary Lao development discourse. A particular notion of village community is central to Lao government platforms for poverty reduction. Prime Ministerial Instruction No.1 2000 designates "the villages as the implementation units" of the Lao government (High, 2006a: 27). This instruction states that "village communities" are to "take initiatives" in poverty reduction efforts. The village focus is replicated in multilateral, bilateral and NGO foreign aid interventions, which often favour the village as the best site for attacking the 'root' causes of poverty. Through this strong village community focus, the very real causes of poverty outside village bounds are elided: the village community is held up as both the location of and the solution to poverty. Obligatory village-based initiatives have included Village Development Funds, Water Users' Groups and various "donations" of cash, labour and material (High, 2006a: 27–8). These 'participatory' poverty reduction initiatives assume that persons who live in a common village share their poverty and share a common interest to work for the common good to alleviate poverty. In reality, however, village leaders have struggled to rally this kind of solidarity. People's responses to poverty have been more personal, more diverse and more geographically expansive than the village community model assumes (High, 2005). Part of this diversity and expansiveness can be discerned in the community that is ritually represented to the puta. The village community imagined in Prime Ministerial Instruction No. 1 2000 is not the village community that is ritualised and celebrated in the feasting of the puta. This disjuncture is telling of the general disjuncture between the village community as envisaged in policy and the village community as lived in reality.

I take my lead from Weber: communal social relationships are understood as those that are "based on a subjective feeling of the parties, whether affectual or traditional, that they belong together". In so doing, I move away from a narrow linguistic focus on the use of the 'c' word itself, and instead seek to understand the creation, expression and deployment of 'subjective feelings' of belonging. As Reynolds notes in this volume, *chumchon* (community) in Thai is likely of quite recent origin, perhaps first entering the lexicon through royal invention, and from there passing into bureaucratic language, where it now enjoys a healthy life in state and development projects. But the uptake in colloquial speech seems to have been more patchy. Perhaps, to borrow Prince Wan's phrase, the term has not yet entirely rallied the "sanction of the genius of the language" (Reynolds, Chapter 2). Andrew Walker (Chapter 6) notes that the word *chumchon* was used infrequently in the village in northern Thailand where he worked. Likewise, in Don Khiaw, the village where this chapter takes us,[2] the official Lao translation for community, *sumson*, was rarely heard. More often discussed were the social units of *ban* (village) and *huen* (household), the sentiments of *haksa kan* (care for each other) and *beng nyeng kan* (watch over each other), and the often administratively-imposed obligation to work *suan huam* (for the common good). This chapter investigates how these first four forms and sentiments are symbolised, configured and employed in the feasting of the puta, as a means of understanding how a form of community is experienced and deployed.

The approach taken by the residents of Don Khiaw involves an 'open' definition of community. For Weber, the core of the communal is a sentiment of belonging. By contrast, he defines the "associative" (*Vergesellschaftung*) as based on rationally motivated agreements. The distinction between Vergemeinschaftung and Vergesellschaftung is in essence a contrast of how the relationship is valued by actors: Vergemeinschaftung relationships are those valued for their own sake, while Vergesellschaftung relationships are those that are valued as instrumental for some other expediency. From this formulation, it is immediately apparent that one relationship may contain elements of both Vergemeinschaftung and Vergesellschaftung. Indeed, Weber (1968: 41) does not suggest that the "associative" and the "communal" are mutually exclusive and is at pains to point out that these are best conceived of as a continuum rather than a dichotomy. The key element in recognising Vergemeinschaftung is not the absence of rational, associative aspects, but the presence of a sentiment of belonging together.

The use of the term 'community' to refer to any group with a common interest in an external phenomena — whether geographically based or interest-based — misses the essence of Weber's definition. Co-residents of a village, a neighbourhood, or a nation-state do not automatically qualify as a community under Weber's formulation: co-residence in these units indicates only a common (though probably unequal) relationship to a spatial or administrative structure. This relationship would be considered Vergemeinschaftung only if co-residents also maintained a sentiment of belonging together. It is not a shared relationship to an environment but a shared relationship to each other that is distinctive of communal relationships. In this formulation, community cannot be assumed to exist due to a common interest or location. Instead the issues of if and how communal sentiments are formed, maintained and contested becomes a series of questions.

Weber also makes a point of separating the communal/associative distinction from the open/closed distinction. An "open" relationship is one that "does not deny participation to anyone who wishes to join and is actually in a position to do so", while a "closed" relationship is one that exists in reference to rules or feelings that exclude certain persons. In Weber's definition, both associative and communal relationships can be either open or closed (Weber, 1968: 43). This reluctance to narrowly limit the communal to a closed and small-scale unit distances Weber's analysis from Tönnies' famous descriptions of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. Community (Gemeinschaft), in Tönnies' use, is closed, enduring and intimate, while society (Gesellschaft) is the opposite (Tönnies, 1957: 33-5). He notes that "the expression of bad *Gemeinschaft* violates the meaning of the word" (Tönnies, 1957: 34). Tönnies' use of the community is a "closed" one in the further sense that it ties the community concept to a raft of other images, ideals and ideas, so that it serves as a set of answers instead of being an open question.

Is it significant that while Tönnies uses the term *Gemeinschaft* (community), Weber uses *Vergemeinschaftung*, a word that implies the activity of bringing community into being? Weber includes no specific discussion of this particular aspect of his choice of words and the translators of his work have chosen an adjective ('communal') as the best English approximation. However, they left *Vergemeinschaftung* in brackets, perhaps to signal a deficit in the translation. Indeed, it is difficult to express in English — 'community-ing' is distinctly inelegant. 'Pooling' is one suggestion, though too narrow to encompass Weber's particular definition of communal sentiments. Perhaps 'doing community' is the

best way of expressing community as an activity. One argument of this chapter is that attention to how people 'do community' is a more fruitful line of enquiry than a search for 'the community'.

In Tönnies' definition, Gemeinschaft has appeared as a rigid set of pre-packaged answers. Community as a term has generally tended to be accompanied by other nouns such as tradition, village, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, subsistence economy, and local knowledge (Reynolds, Chapter 2). Only as a noun can it appear in the singular (a community), thus raising the continual problem of boundaries — you are either in the community or you are not. On the other hand, Vergemeinschaftung (doing community) associates with words like create, ritualise, evoke, care for each other and look after each other. Instead of a recurring question of boundaries, there is a recurring question of activities: the ways that people build, express and employ communal sentiments.

Thinking in terms of the activity of the communal — rather than in terms of community as an object — invites us to consider the diversity of constructions of this sentiment. How do people 'do' community in different contexts? In this chapter I aim neither to dismiss the concept of community nor to elevate it to a universalising narrative of authentic southern Lao sociality. Instead, I aim to map out how communal sentiments are constituted in one particularly evocative event: the ritual feasting of the puta. Moments of ritual can be understood, following Durkheim, as expressions of the symbolic force of community. These are moments of activity when simplified, and thus sanctified, representations are made of communal sentiments. As such, rituals provide a fertile line of enquiry for asking how people do community.

THE PUTA RITUAL

Mae Kham reaches into a cage, deftly pulling out the small chicken she has selected. She holds it upside down by the feet, one wing tucked under the other. Upstairs in the kitchen, the chicken is calm in her hands. Mae Kham plucks the bird's neck bare, then draws a sharp knife firmly across the exposed throat. The blood drains into a dish and the chicken silently dies. Mae Kham plucks and guts the bird, breaks the legs and folds them into the intestinal cavity. She folds the wings up over the breasts, tucking the head under these. "This is how we prepare the chicken for puta", she explains, pausing for me to photograph the arrangement before she boils the bird.

Figure 5.1 Four bamboo skewers arranged in a banana leaf to be offered to the puta. Along the length of the bamboo, a break is made for each person or animal included in the household.

Mae Kham takes a machete and cuts a banana leaf from her orchard. Using skewers carved from bamboo, she secures eight strips of banana leaf into cones. She fills these cones with eight flowers each. These are gathered together in a larger banana-leaf cone. Finally, Mae Kham cuts four more fine bamboo skewers — one for the human members of the household, one for the buffalos, another for pigs, and another for ducks and chickens. Along the length of the bamboo, a break is made for each person or animal included in the household. This action is called *hak mai*, literally "break wood". Watching this, Noy asks her mother, Suay, the purpose of hak mai and Suay replies, "to let them know how many people, how many buffalos, how many chickens, ducks". Mae Kham says that she broke wood and "feasted" the puta so that she and her family would *yu di mi haeng* (live well and be strong) and so that the puta would *beng nyeng haksa* (watch over and care for) the household. The bamboo skewers are placed in the banana-leaf bouquet and the arrangement is tied to a Pepsi bottle filled with rice alcohol. These are placed on a plate along with the boiled chicken, a handful of cooked rice and a set of betel nuts.

I hear the procession approaching before I see them — the slow thump of a large drum, hands clapping, voices singing, laughing and a

rat-tat-tat made out with sticks on tins and other cast-offs. The procession is composed of men in fanciful costume, many with a bamboo rocket slung over their shoulder. Some women accompany the men, bearing their plates of chicken, alcohol and bamboo skewers. At each house, female members of the household are engaged in the theatrical humour with a core group of performing and jesting men. Then, a member or two of that household joins the procession, bearing a plate with either a boiled chicken or egg, and the procession moves on.

The procession quickly swells to a high-spirited crowd; alcohol is being consumed in hot, foul-tasting shots. After visiting each household, our procession turns inland toward the puta shrine. The approach to the shrine is a single track, angling between rice fields, then through scrub. The ritual officiants, Mi and Wong, lead us between the trees into an overgrown, densely-green and thick-aired clearing. They call out "puta puta, your children and descendants have come to visit you, to look after you, to feed you. The children of the village are here to feast you!"

They head to a dilapidated three-walled structure, the puta shrine, continuing to hail the puta. The structure is just large enough for the two officiants to kneel before an altar, a slab-shaped rock plastered with burnt candles. Behind and around the altar are the dried and decayed remains of past offerings — flowers, betel nut and bamboo skewers. Along the rear wall, behind the rock, lean half a dozen wooden replicas of weapons — guns, knives and swords. Those men and boys who have made rockets come forward to rest the rockets, head up, against the raised floor of the shrine.

The crowd forms a rough semi-circle, some sitting and others standing, allowing a clear space in front of the shrine. Many spectators from various locales have joined the procession here, so that the audience is now several hundred people. Regarding the spectators, Phet explains, "They have different traditions, our tradition is like Don Bo and Hua Don villages, but many villages don't have this tradition. So they have come to watch."

The officiants, lighting the candles, call to the puta to *ma der, ma der* (please come, please come). The offerings are bought forward by the supplicants and placed in the puta pavilion under the guidance of the officiants. The officiants take the betel nut and banana-leaf bouquets with their bamboo skewers and arrange these on and around the altar. They splash some of the alcohol on the stone altar. The officiants call the puta to come and eat the chickens, eggs and alcohol

Figure 5.2 The shrine to the puta, featuring a sacred stone topped by a candle and carved replicas of guns. Offerings to the puta are placed around the stone by the officiant (seated right).

and to enjoy the betel nut. When they are finished, people rush to the shrine to retrieve their plates and chickens or eggs — the bouquets and bamboo are left by the altar. Those with boiled eggs peel them and the position of the yolk is analysed in order to predict the coming year's rice crop. Similarly, those with boiled chickens extract the tongue cartilage: a straight cartilage indicates a successful harvest in the coming year.

The men take the rockets from the shrine to a tree on the edge of the puta forest. The rockets explode with a great rushing noise and huge plumes of smoke. Those that are successful fly high into the air. Those that are unsuccessful go nowhere and are obscured in their own futile smoke. The revellers disperse, heading for home, or to observe the proceedings at another shrine in the south of the island.

THE PUTA AND THE "CHILDREN OF THE VILLAGE"

The term *puta* is defined in Kerr (1972) as "the good spirit of the village".[3] Residents of Don Khiaw, however, maintain that the puta

is neither spirit nor human. One man dreamed of the puta as "like a person, but big and black, a male". This figure is often depicted as patrolling and protecting the village territory. The puta is held to be efficacious in averting accidents and some illnesses, especially illnesses afflicting buffalo. To this end, appeals may be made by simply calling out to the puta. More formal petitions, or 'bargains', are made at a special shrine located in each 'village'. I have put the term 'village' in quotation marks here because the village for the purposes of the puta cult is not co-terminous with the village for administrative purposes. The island of Don Khiaw was classed by the Government of Laos as one village, but in terms of the puta cult it was two villages — one to the north of the island and one to the south. Each of these 'villages' has its own puta entity and shrine in a secluded patch of forest towards the middle of the 'village' territory. At each, a male resident is designated as the officiant. Food and drink are offered to the puta through the mediation of the officiant to rectify offences[4] or to ask for a special favour (such as the return of a lost buffalo) and to notify the puta of changes of residence. The main rituals performed at the shrine are the *liang puta* (care for the puta) performed in the sixth (as described above) and third lunar month each year. The liang puta of the sixth month must be completed before the new rice season in May. As one farmer put it, "no one would be brave enough to begin to plough before we have feasted the puta". At these events, the "children of the village" petition for care and protection to be extended to the members of each household. Each household prepares a plate containing its offering to the puta, like that described in the previous section. The offering plate invariably includes a set of flower bouquets wrapped in banana leaf with snapped bamboo skewers placed within them. Most offerings contain four bamboo skewers, each broken several times to represent the people and animals included in the household. During the liang puta, the plates containing the offerings are crammed next to each other on the floor of the shrine around the stone. After the ritual, the bouquets with their snapped skewers are left around the stone to dry and decay, while the food that is 'left over' from the puta's feasting is eaten by the supplicants. Residents reported that they snapped the bamboo skewers and feasted the puta so that household members would "live well and be strong" and the puta would "watch over and care for" the household.

This is a ritual of community, in the sense that Weber suggested, because its core activities hinge on the notion of belonging together.

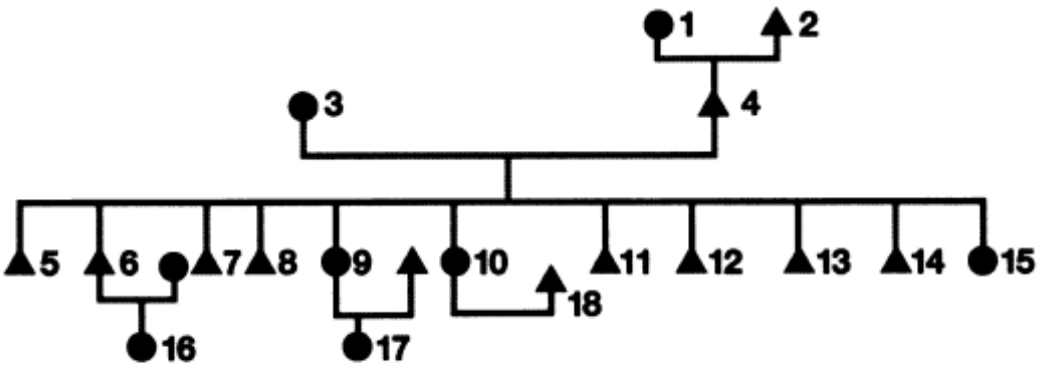

Figure 5.3 Mae Khancay's household. A circle represents a female, a triangle a male.

Participants referred to themselves as the "children of the village" (*luk ban*) and referred to the ritual as a particular distinguishing feature of their village. Attendance was expected from one or two members from each household and the offering plates they took along contained a visual and tactile symbol of membership — a bamboo skewer that is snapped once for each household member. Who is included in this expression of belonging? Below, I examine three offering plates and the households that they represented. I find that the membership represented in this way is startlingly inclusive. Members who rotate in and out of the village, or indeed live permanently elsewhere, are included as full members of the household and represented to the puta for care and protection as "children of the village".

The first household offering is that of Mae Khancay,[5] represented as a kinship diagram in Figure 5.3. Over the months that I had become familiar with Mae Khancay's household, I was accustomed to finding four people in residence: herself (3), her husband (4), a son (14) and a daughter (15). The son and daughter undertook the heavy tasks in rice production, and at other times they left to work in the Bolaven Plateau or Thailand,[6] always making sure that one of the two was in the house to care for their parents. I was surprised then to see Mae Khancay (3) break the skewer 13 times, once each for herself and her husband and each of their eleven children: "It is to care for them and have them live well and strong. I do it for all my children. We still love them. We still break the skewer for them. Even if they go and make a new family. Even if they never come back, we still love them," she explained.

Their eldest son (5) lives in Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand. He fled there in 1977 and lived with his paternal grandmother (1), who had married a Thai soldier (2) when Don Khiaw was part of Thailand during the Second World War and had left for Thailand when the border was adjusted to its current position in 1946. This son has returned to visit Don Khiaw three times and occasionally sends home sums of money. Their next son (6) lives about an hour's boat trip south on an island near the Cambodian border. He is a rice farmer, a fish trader and is married with five children. He visits regularly but Mae Khancay says he is too poor to send any money as "he doesn't have enough fields, not enough rice". Last year he sent his eldest daughter (16) to help Mae Khancay (3) harvest rice.

Mae Khancay's next child is also a son (7). He moved about two hours' boat trip north five years ago when he took a wife there and entered her family trading business. He sends about 400,000 to 500,000 *kip* (US$40–50) to his parents each year. Yet another son (8) now lives on the Bolaven Plateau, where he owns a coffee plantation. His sister (9) also lives up there, where she married a plantation owner after visiting her brother there one dry season. She sent her four-year-old daughter (17) to live with Mae Khancay (3) on Don Khiaw for most of 2003. The teenage son and daughter of Mae Khancay (14 and 15) depart to these plantations when they are not farming rice on Don Khiaw.

Mae Khancay (3) has another daughter still resident on Don Khiaw (10). She married (18) and the couple live with her husband's mother and farm her land in the south of the island. Another son (11) lives only 20 minutes away, further south on the mainland riverbank. He makes a living farming rice and trading fish to Pakse, the provincial capital. Two sons of Mae Khancay live in Pakse. One (12) is attending the agricultural technical college. He does not work and his father pays for all of his living expenses and school fees. His father often comments on the difficulty of finding this cash, relying on the sale of rice and help from his other children, but he states, "I want to promote one of my children to have a higher education." Another son (13) has recently started work in a factory in Pakse. Mae Khancay (3) found the job for him through friends and was active in accompanying him to the factory, thereby incurring considerable travel costs that had to be borrowed from friends. Mae Khancay did not break wood for her grandchildren or children-in-law (16, 17, 18).

In summary, the representation of Mae Khancay's household on the skewer excluded many members of her kinship network (such as

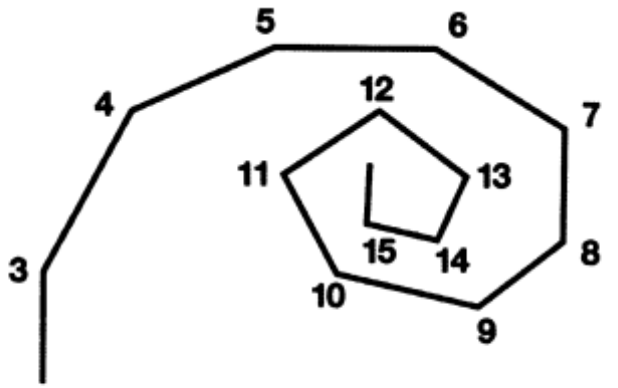

Figure 5.4 Mae Khancay's skewer. The 13 snaps along the length represent each member of her household to the puta (numbers correspond to the kinship diagram).

her children's children and the spouses of her children), but it included her own children who live elsewhere permanently or who frequently move. The skewer in Mae Khancay's offering looked something like Figure 5.4. Tellingly, of the 13 snaps made along the length of the skewer, only three persons were present in the household domain at the time of the ritual. What is striking about the skewer is the visual and tactile sense it gives of the household as a unit, despite the spatial dispersal of the members. This was accompanied by verbal affirmations of the continuity of care and protection in the family. If we were to take the example of Mae Khancay's household alone as an example of how community is enacted in contemporary Laos, it would be apparent already that place-based notions of community will not suffice. The sense of belonging and territory that the puta cult expresses is relational, marked by human mobility, physically separated families, and sentiments of belonging that endure through these aspects (High, 2006b).

The second case study is Mae Kiaw's household, represented in Figure 5.5. Mae Kiaw (1) at present lives with her husband Pho Hian (2). Two of her daughters (3 and 4) and one of her sons (5), along with their young families, have recently taken land in Ban Phattana, a new village some ten hours' walk to the west. These children had previously lived with or near Mae Kiaw and Pho Hian. When they left for Ban Phatthana, the officiant was instructed to inform the puta of their departure. At the annual ritual, Mae Kiaw broke the skewer for all of these members, including the children and spouses. She explained

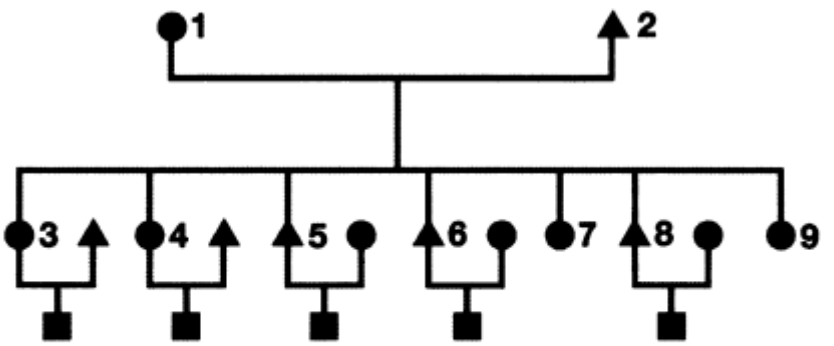

Figure 5.5 Mae Kiaw's household. A circle represents a female, a triangle a male and a square represents aggregates of multiple children.

that the new settlement did not have a puta and that she wanted to care for them.

Mae Kiaw (1) and Pho Hian (2) have another two daughters, Doy (7) and Bang (9), who live in a Vientiane garment factory. They have worked there for the last four and seven years respectively. Both women are unmarried and in their late twenties. Mae Kiaw snapped a skewer for these two unmarried daughters "to make sure they are safe when they are far away". Because her other children left for Ban Phatthana, Mae Nyang asked one of these daughters, Doy (7), to come and live with her in Don Khiaw. When Doy (7) arrived from Vientiane, the officiant was sent to announce her return to the puta. Doy (7) took on the responsibility of cultivating her parents' land, ploughing and transplanting alone.

Mae Kiaw and Pho Hian have another two adult sons (6 and 8). They have each taken wives some distance away. Mae Kiaw did not make a break on the skewer for them. "People who have run away [*ni*] don't count!" says Pho Hian. "Their new families will make a break for them" speculated Mae Kiaw.

The final case study is Mae Foy's household, depicted in Figure 5.6. Mae Foy made seven breaks for the residents of her household: one each for herself (4), her husband (5), invalid mother (1) and two teenage children (8 and 9), who all live permanently in the house in Don Khiaw. She also made a break for one of her sisters, Mae Bun (6), and another for one of her daughters, Muey (7). They run a noodle store and cultivate a coffee plantation in Paksong. The plantation belongs to Mae Lot (2), another sister of Mae Foy. Mae Lot (2) has married a beef trader (3) and lives permanently in Paksong town. She sells beef

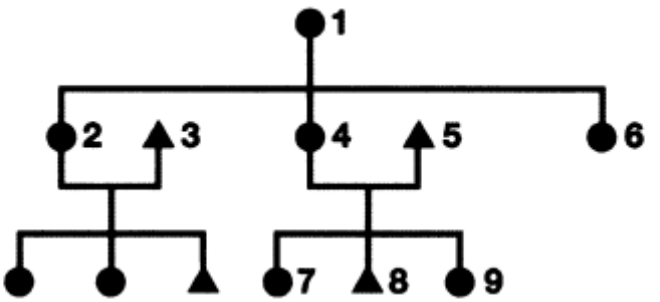

Figure 5.6 Mae Foy's household. A circle represents a female, a triangle a male.

in the market there. Sometimes Muey (7) helps her at the market or at her house. Muey (7) and Mae Bun (6) take primary responsibility for the coffee plantation, weeding it and spending much of the dry season picking there. During that period they also operate their noodle soup stall, catering for the influx of workers employed for the picking season. The noodles that they sell are produced at Mae Foy's (4) house on Don Khiaw, and they are flavoured with beef from Mae Lot's (2) beef store. "They come and go", Mae Foy (4) explained of Muey (7) and Mae Bun (6), "to find money." Phan (5) interjects, "really, they are still of our house".

These case studies provide insights into how communal sentiments are enacted in the feasting of the puta. During the ritual, the "children of the village", grouped into household units, offered food, alcohol and flowers to the "good spirit" in order to care for that entity. The good spirit was asked in return to care for the people. The rightful recipients of the puta's care were indicated through a snapped skewer included in the offering, one snap for each member of the household. Notably, these skewers are not homogenous in the inclusions and exclusions they make from among the possible set of kin relations. Mae Khancay's petition included all of her children, even those that were not resident with her, but excluded her children-in-law and grandchildren, even those that were resident with her for long periods. Mae Kiaw's household, by contrast, excluded her married sons but included daughters' husbands and children, whether resident or not. Mae Foy's offering included all 'residents' of the household, and only them, though two of these residents lived and worked some eight hours away for most of the year. These kinds of discrepancies between households were not a matter of concern for practitioners of the ritual. The preparation of the offering was invariably carried out at the family home,

not in consultation with the wider group, and there was agreement that member households had discretion in terms of whom they wanted to represent to the puta as household members and thus as "children of the village". Furthermore, the particulars of these representations were not easily translated by fellow supplicants at the puta shrine — the snapped skewer does not communicate clearly to onlookers exactly who has been included. This lack of homogeneity is consistent with a generally open definition of village membership. The village chief stated that there was nothing to stop new residents from moving into the puta territory, should they be able to acquire land (precisely Weber's definition of an open relationship). This lack of homogeneity also means that, viewed from any one particular member's perspective, the community does not necessarily correlate with the perspective of another member. While it was clear to Mae Khancay that all of her children, even her adult son in Thailand, were to be counted as part of the "children of the village", it was just as clear to Mae Kiaw that her adult son was not to be counted. Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that Mae Foy knew this about the other families or indeed that she cared. While all three women understood themselves as "children of the village", their knowledge of who else was or was not part of that village was fuzzy at best.

Significantly, in none of the offerings considered above were all of the members represented actually in the household at the time of the ritual. The puta ritual does not insist that members of a single household reside under a single roof, nor that the "children of the village" permanently reside in the mapped locale of the village. A person represented as a child of the village to the puta can include migrant workers in the Bolaven Plateau or abroad, factory workers in the urban centres, children who study away from home, members who have settled elsewhere or people who regularly move between places. The household, as represented to the puta, is multi-sited and thus so too, in a sense, is the village. Mae Khancay's inclusion of all of her children, whatever their location, reflects the fact that migration and movement do not necessarily end feelings of belonging together. As Mae Khancay succinctly states, "We still love them. We still hak mai (break the skewer on the offering plate) for them." This sentiment is echoed by Phan's insistence that his peripatetic daughter and sister-in-law "are still of our house". In these movements, the puta is said to follow and protect — *beng nyeng* (watch over) and *haksa* (care for) — these people. These are precisely the same terms that are used to express how people

watch over and care for each other. Puta belief and practice can thus be seen as an expression of the care, support and sense of belonging that extends in the communal sentiments of dispersed households.

It is often assumed that the traditional village community exists only in areas untouched by the market or modernity. The example of the puta ritual, on the other hand, demonstrates how both traditions and community can be deployed (not destroyed) in distinctly modern contexts. Community is both more important and more robust than the notion of a fragile and pristine village community would suggest. A look at the offerings made to the puta provides a glimpse of modern Tai community at work.

THE PUTA AND SPACE-TIME

In the case studies examined above, the importance of movements over time are evident. People who are related do not always live together and members of a family group will often move about — this much seems obvious. Yet the kinship diagram — so often used to explain kin relations — is a cumbersome means of representing this mobility. It lacks an axis indicating time and frequently also lacks a means of expressing spatiality. I will use graphics modelled on Hägerstrand's (1978: 123) time-space diagram to add what he terms "time-depth" to our understandings of households and a sense of belonging. Hägerstrand (1978: 127–30) illustrates both spatial domains and people's "trajectories" through domains and time by using a "space-time box".

For this exercise I will take a new example, that of Mae Kham's household. Mae Kham has already appeared in this chapter: she was described preparing an offering plate for the puta in the second section. During this preparation, she broke a skewer seven times for the seven members of her household. This representation of her household was seemingly straightforward because all of the members for whom she made a snap were present at the time in the household. These people consisted of Mae Kham and her husband, their daughter and her husband, and three grandchildren. The members thus represented could be depicted quite simply through a kinship diagram (Figure 5.7). However, this kinship diagram does not reveal the importance of mobility over time.

A space-time diagram represents Mae Kham's household movements (Figure 5.8.) The vertical axis represents a time period of 60 years. The horizontal axis represents what Hägerstrand describes as the

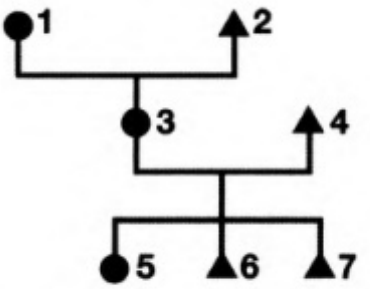

Figure 5.7 Mae Kham's household. A circle represents a female, a triangle a male.

"roominess" of the domain, its spatial capacity. Domains appear as shaded areas. The shaded area on the left represents the farm on Don Khiaw. The middle shaded area is a house in Pakse and the shaded area furthest to the right is a plantation on the Bolaven Plateau. Persons are represented as lines moving in and out of these domains. People born in the domain within the time span are represented as trajectories which begin with a circle. Deaths within the domain and during the time span are represented with a diamond end to the trajectory. Trajectories which enter a domain box from below represent persons already present in the domain at the commencement of the time period. Trajectories

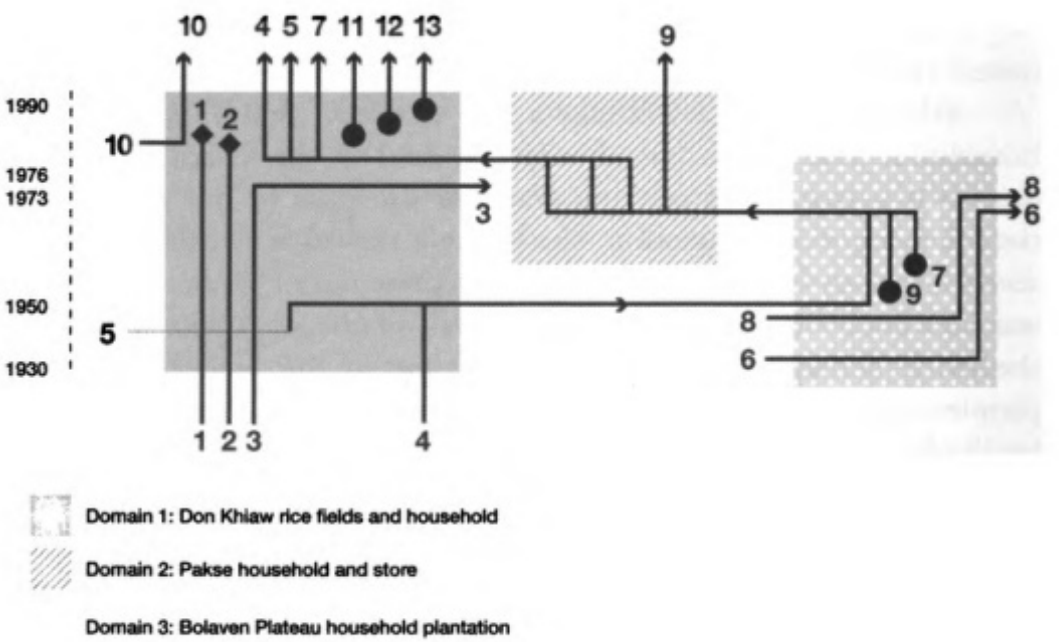

Figure 5.8 Mae Kham's household through space and time.

entering from the left represent persons moving from other domains and taking up residency in the domain at that point of time. Trajectories leaving from the top of the domain represent persons resident in that domain at the end of the time period. Trajectories leaving from the right represent persons who moved on to other unspecified domains. By following a numbered trajectory from beginning to end point, it is possible to follow the movements of persons and groups through time. The trajectories and major movements can be summarised as:

Trajectory 1: Mae May. The mother of 12 children whom she raised in the Don Khiaw rice farm domain.

Trajectory 2: Mae On, a spinster daughter of Mae May, who lived with her until her death on the Don Khiaw rice farm domain.

Trajectory 3: An aggregate representation of other household members co-resident with Mae May who, over time, moved on to other domains not represented here or passed away.

Trajectory 4: Mae Kham, Mae May's youngest daughter. She lived with Mae May until maturity, then married Pho Ko.

Trajectory 5: Pho Ko, a neighbour who married Mae Kham and lived with her and Mae May on the Don Khiaw rice farm domain for a short while before moving with Mae Kham to create a plantation on the Bolaven Plateau.

Trajectory 6: Various labourers hired on the Bolaven Plateau plantation domain.

Trajectory 7: Suay, a girl born to Mae Kham and Pho Ko in the Bolaven Plateau plantation domain.

Trajectory 8: Bunmi, a boy born to Mae Kham and Pho Ko in the Bolaven Plateau plantation domain. He later moved to another plantation on the Bolaven Plateau.

Trajectory 9: Thawi, a second son adopted by Mae Kham and Pho Ko in the Bolaven Plateau plantation domain. He moved with them to the Pakse household store domain and remained there until the end of the time period represented.

The year 1973 marks a significant disruption in the Bolaven Plateau plantation domain. The domain effectively ended for the purposes of the trajectories represented here because of American bombing. Suay, Thawi, Mae Kham and Pho Ko travelled on foot as refugees to Pakse.

Their labourers scattered to unknown destinations. Bunmi remained in the region, though not on the actual plantation, and eventually established his own plantation in a nearby area.

The year 1976 represents another major movement, as Suay (7), Mae Kham (4) and Pho Ko (5) relocated to the Don Khiaw rice farm household domain. They report that the move was precipitated by the need to care for the ailing Mae May (1), whose other family members had either passed or moved away, especially during the food shortages just after the revolution. Mae Kham and Pho Ko retain ownership of the house in Pakse.

Trajectory 10: Cit, a labourer hired to assist with the transplant and who then married Suay.
Trajectories 11, 12, 13: A daughter and two sons born to Cit and Suay.

While the previous section showed that household offerings represent significant spatial dispersal at one point of time, here we see the importance of dispersal through various domains over time. Mae Kham's household presented a seemingly simple representation to the puta at the time of the ritual with all household members present in the household. However, a view through the lens of time reveals this as only the latest configuration of various trajectories and domains. In many ways, the movements of Mae Kham through these 60 years have always taken place in a context of national and international events. It was to cultivate coffee and vegetables for "the French" that she and Pho Ko moved to the Bolaven Plateau. It was under threat of American bombs that the family relocated to Pakse. It was the need to care for family during the food shortages that propelled them to move again, this time back to Don Khiaw. Looking out over their rice fields, or in the darkness after dinner, Mae Kham and Pho Ko would frequently tell stories of the Bolaven Plateau plantation. They told of the enormous vegetables they grew from the seeds that the French people gave them, Mae Kham grabbing her ankle to demonstrate the size of the carrots. They would laugh at the ethnic minority labourers they hired, almost naked and insisting on sleeping around the hearth in the kitchen. And they would recount again their terrible journey on foot through the jungle to Pakse, when all that they had owned was burnt and destroyed by war. These memories continue to inform Mae Kham's experience of her home on Don Khiaw today. Mae Kham tells us that she walked away from her Bolaven plantation as a refugee with nothing but what

she wore. Nevertheless, she carried with her a sense of that place and time, a place lost but not forgotten.

This sense of the past is evident in the networks of relationships Mae Kham maintains today. Her adopted son (Trajectory 8) still lives on the Plateau, having now established his own coffee plantation. When large purchases are made, such as when the household purchased a rice mill, he is asked to contribute funds. Suay makes annual visits to his household on the Plateau, bringing fish and rice for him. He uses this network connection too, recruiting labour for the coffee picking season through Mae Kham's contacts in the lowlands.[7]

Attention to the histories of other participants in the puta ritual reveal a similar context of movement and wide networks. The officiant of the puta ritual, Mi, was himself a refugee in the early years after the revolution, spending almost 20 years in the northeast of Thailand, in and out of the refugee camps there. His sister was a refugee there too, eventually marrying a Cambodian man in the camp. The couple were accepted as refugees to America. Later, responding to family urging, Mi returned to their maternal home to care for their mother. He still lives there now and his sister sends occasional gifts and lately over US$1,000 towards the construction of a new house. Mi's experience of his home now includes a network that extends internationally to a sister in the United States and relatives in Thailand. Mi's story is just one of 360,000 — the figure estimated for the number of people who fled across the Thai border after the 1975 revolution, representing some 10 per cent of Laos' population.[8] About 300,000 of these found new homes in countries such as Australia, the United States, France and Canada (Mekong Migration Network, 2002: 123). The remainder were repatriated with the assistance of UNHCR and the Thai government. Over a quarter of a century later, there is great variety in how, and how intensely, relationships with these dispersed loved ones are maintained. Many form part of dispersed networks that are the basis of the sense of belonging at play in Don Khiaw, in the stories people tell, the pathways they take and, as we have seen — the rituals they make.

This insistence on the saliency of mobility does not aim to suggest that households and persons are somehow placeless. What Hägerstrand's diagrams represent so well is that persons exist as trajectories in both space and time. Physical domains, and people's experience of them, remain salient. Yet these domains are extroverted, expressing always their relation to other domains, distant people and times past.

Recalling, then, the offering plates crammed into the puta shrine in the sixth month, the snapped skewers left around the stone altar, and the alcohol-soaked entreaties for the well-being and strength for the "children of the village" and for the puta entity to look after and protect those so represented, we see not an expression of an inward-looking community of isolation and static immobility. Instead, what is ritualised is a sense of place and belonging informed by senses of other places and other times, with households incorporating scattered members and present members incorporating varied pasts. Having explored the various histories of the participants, their experiences as refugees, entrepreneurs and obliged household members, their movements through domains, and the dispersed networks which they maintain, the relational and extroverted notion of belonging expressed in the puta ritual seems only to be expected.

COMMUNAL SENTIMENTS RITUALISED

The puta offerings provide a palpable and emotive representation of 'communal' sentiments such as hak pheng fkan (care for each other) and haksa kan (look after each other), even as they indicate how loved ones can be distant and groupings can be transient. The rituals represent people as members of groups, the most important group being the household and then the village; at the same time, these household and village members need not reside permanently in the household or the village. Indeed, persons represented as "children of the village" were located in a variety of domains, or shuttled between domains, and incorporated varied and mobile pasts. These movements were often facilitated by and in turn created expansive networks. These networks are historical in the sense that they express the particular histories of the members and the contingencies that threw people together or drew them apart, and that they change over time. The household and, by extension, the village, are best conceived of as multi-sited, containing important spatial manifestations but not dependent on closed boundaries or immobile members. This evidence suggests that understandings of community in the contemporary Tai lands need to incorporate how communal sentiments are forged in their particular circumstances.

It might be objected that these conclusions on the ritualisation of communal sentiments are too specific. They refer to the arrangement found in one ritual in one village in Laos. Furthermore, the location of that village — close to Thailand, in a poor agricultural district and in

the middle of the Mekong River — lends it a distinctive position and history: once a part of Thailand, then returned to Laos only to see the effects of war, socialism and displacement of a significant proportion of the population. Is the kind of community seen here not an example of a world torn apart? Is this not a special case rather than an exemplar of community? The point I wish to make here is not that all communities conform to the configuration seen in Don Khiaw or that Don Khiaw is an exemplar of an archetypal form of community. Rather, the point is that all forms of community need to be understood within their own matrix of location, history and symbolism. Don Khiaw is indeed a specific configuration of these, but so too are all other places and groups that might be termed communities. My suggestion is that a fruitful use of the community concept is to seek to understand how community is configured in the many and varied situations in which it arises. In Don Khiaw, it emerges that communal sentiments are expressed as multi-sited and extroverted. This sits uncomfortably with established notions of community as a distinct, closed, and geographically limited group. However, rather than prompting an abandonment of the community concept, this knowledge opens up a vista of enquiry. How are sentiments of belonging made in these and other contexts? Community is thus revised from a set of pre-packaged answers to an open and provocative question.

Given this indeterminacy, can the blanket policy of village community-driven poverty reduction encompassed in official Lao government policy be effective? Before answering, it is best to consider what we mean by 'effective' — effective in reducing poverty or effective in extending state power? The argument made by Ferguson (1994) regarding the development industry in Lesotho was that it routinely fails to reduce poverty, yet it routinely succeeds in extending state power. The use of village community in contemporary Lao policy likewise has more impact in terms of the articulation of the state (and the non-state) than in terms of poverty reduction (High, 2006c). However, community as enacted by rural Lao remains obstinately an open question. Community is viewed differently by different members, and different members represent themselves as enmeshed in networks that are multi-sited and incorporate diverse histories and travels. This complexity does not fit easily with the kind of totalising understanding of essences usually identified with state knowledge and state policy. As such, the Lao government's attempt to transform the countryside into stable, legible village community units is not a process of formalising

an already present phenomenon but one of creating and recreating ideal administrative units from the messy contradictions and contingencies of rural life, either through persuasion or coercion. The success of the village community approach in thereby extending the reach of the state, or legitimising the lack of servicing by the state, is contingent and will be an interesting issue to watch in the coming years.

Can community, as described in this chapter, be used to end poverty? I think the answer is yes, with the qualification that communal networks are already used by members to reduce poverty. One only needs to consider how Mae Khancay's dispersed children operated to secure labour for her rice fields and some cash for her household needs, or how Mae Kiaw's daughter returned from the Vientiane factory to labour for her, or how Mae Foy's family cooperated across three locations to operate a beef noodle soup business, to see that these networks of belonging are also vital networks of surviving and, for some, prospering. So sentiments of belonging are a crucial aspect of rural Lao attempts to reduce poverty. However, these examples also demonstrate that although poverty is experienced at the village level, the causes and solutions are ultimately not to be found there. These are the best efforts of marginalised people under difficult circumstances and it is these broader circumstances that are the cause and possible solution to Lao poverty.

6

The Festival, the Abbot and the Son of the Buddha

Andrew Walker

In northern Thailand it is customary to hold a great festival (*poi luang*) to consecrate and celebrate newly constructed or renovated Buddhist structures. In the village of Ban Tiam, such a festival was held over five days in March 2004.[1] The poi luang was held to mark the renovation of the temple's main preaching hall, the installation of new Buddha images and improvements to the temple kitchen. It was an exceptional event.

After days of intense preparation, the festival commenced on March 19, late in the afternoon. A small procession wound its way out of the village, accompanied by drums, gongs and colourful flags. The purpose of the procession was to invite Phra Upakhut to join the festival. Phra Upakhut is locally believed to be the son of the Buddha who resides on the bottom of the small river that winds its way through Ban Tiam's paddy fields. On the outskirts of the village, the procession followed a narrow track down to the river, where the village's lay religious leader recited a prayer of invitation to Upakhut. He then reached into the river and drew out a small stone that was placed on the offering tray that he carried. Upakhut was a small, dark and smooth pebble, about three centimetres high, rounded at the edges and having a shape vaguely reminiscent of a small Buddha image or amulet. During this brief ritual of invitation, the procession was joined by two forest spirits with gruesome heads, toothy smiles and filthy robes. These spirits (*phi kon*) were also coming to join the festival as representatives of the many spirits who had become aware of the poi luang due to its

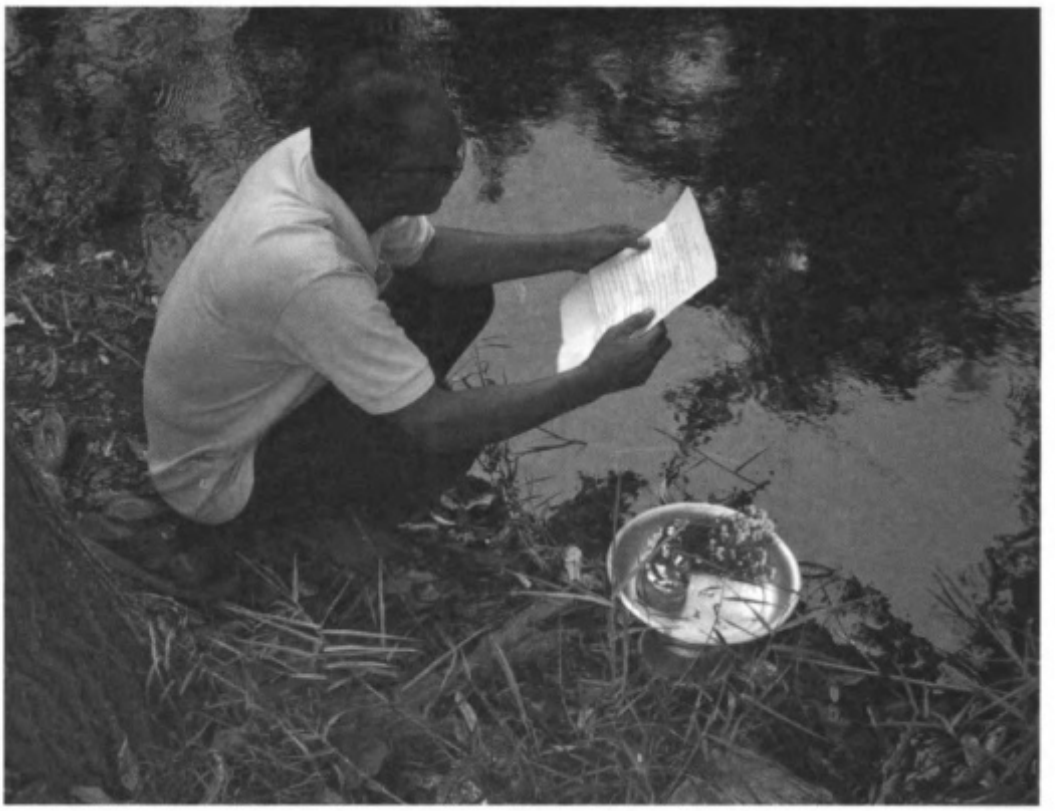

Figure 6.1 Reciting the prayer of invitation to Upakhut.

considerable fame. The procession then made its way back to the village, Upakhut silent on his tray and the spirits dancing around causing mayhem with young children and thrusting what appeared to be prominent erections beneath their robes in the direction of respectable village matrons. "This is just a small ritual", I was assured, "it will be much more fun in the coming days." When the procession reached the temple, the spirits had no hesitation in entering, dancing their lurid way inside the compound, until their skins and heads were eventually shed and hidden away in a back room. Meanwhile, Upakhut was installed in a temporary pavilion at the back of the temple compound, next to the spirit house of the temple's protective spirit. Upakhut was provided with a monk's robe, begging bowl, water bottle, pillow and fan. He was there to protect the festival. Food offerings were bought to him on the mornings that followed.

March 20 was the formal day of preparation. Friends and relatives of the village's 120 or so households were already arriving, sharing in food and making contributions to their host household's merit-making.

Late in the afternoon, a second key ritual took place. The Buddha's ordination objects (*khruang buat*) were presented to the temple. These were taken in procession by the family of the village's lay religious leader, who had made a donation to the temple for the privilege. The procession was accompanied by amplified music, a troupe of young boys playing percussion instruments, the dancing phi kon and a money tree elaborately decorated with paper flowers and 20-baht notes. Until this preliminary offering was made, others in the village could not make their own donations.

The main ritual of the poi luang took place during the night of March 20. This is called the "opening of the eyes of the Buddha". This is a reference to the fact that the new Buddha images had their eyes covered with pads of wax and their heads covered with white hoods. According to ritually informed villagers, the night-long ceremony can be seen as an ordination ceremony for the Buddha images or as training the images (*obrom prajaw*) in the Dhamma. Ban Tiam's abbot explained that the prayers recount the occasion of the Buddha's enlightenment (see also Swearer, 2004: 79). The ceremony involves the night-long chanting of a series of prayers and readings from Buddhist scripture and sermons. The prayers in the preaching hall were conducted by the village abbot, the district ecclesiastical head and his deputy, along with monks from temples within the district and from further afield, especially from the city of Chiang Mai. In all, there were about 20 monks present. At about midnight, a group of virgin (and non-menstruating) girls from the village started to prepare a special dish of sweetened rice (*khaw thip*) in a fenced-off area at the back of the temple compound. The ceremony reached its climax soon after four in the morning, when the cloth and wax coverings were removed from the Buddha images, accompanied by chanting of the eye-opening prayers (*suat boek phranet*). Soon after, the sweetened rice, which had been divided into numerous portions by the village maidens, was presented to the new Buddha images, the monks conducting the ceremony and then the congregation.[2]

The following two days were devoted primarily to celebration and to the presentation of offerings to the temple. Villagers received guests at their houses, the numbers of guests varying greatly according to the social networks, status and financial position of the receiving households. Guests were served food and drinks and usually made a donation to assist with merit-making and defraying the other costs of the festival. Over the course of these two days, villagers took their donations, elaborately displayed on merit-making money trees,

in procession to the temple accompanied by drumming, amplified music, drinking and, often, the dancing phi kon. Processions were also formed by the numerous merit-makers from other villagers coming as representatives of their own temples and participating in an extensive region-wide system of reciprocal donation and celebration. Arriving merit-makers were welcomed by performances of music and traditional dancing. Some groups from other villages arrived with their own singing and dancing shows. As the days progressed to evening and night, the crowds of merit-makers swelled, almost completely blocking the small road leading down to the temple. Modern and highly amplified bands took to the stage in front of the temple, accompanied, of course, by dancing girls (the "white legs") in skimpy outfits. By eight or nine in the evening, merit-making had come to an end and the focus was very much on demerit. A large, rowdy and generally inebriated crowd of villagers and guests enjoyed the performances. Young men (and some older ones who should have known better) eagerly handed cash donations to their favourite dancers on stage. At about midnight, the national anthem signalled an abrupt end to the festivities.

March 23 was the final, cleaning-up day of the festival. Some villagers who had been too busy (or drunk) to present their money trees on the previous days formed small processions to the temple. The village women's group and the youth group also made presentations. Late in the afternoon a merry procession — with snacks in hand and whiskey in bamboo cups — escorted Upakhut and the phi kon out of the village and back down to the river. Upakhut was returned to his watery home and the skins of the spirits abandoned in a clump of trees nearby. The festival had come to an end.

* * *

It is anthropologically commonplace that religious festivals like this are constitutive of something that we might call community. There is an extensive literature on the role of public ritual in creating, enacting, reinforcing and maintaining various forms of collective sentiment. This chapter focuses critically on one specific issue within this vast anthropological literature on ritual — the commonly observed simplification of ritual communication. Durkheim's work on the *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* is a useful starting point. In this classic study, Durkheim writes of the totem as a condensed material manifestation of the diffuse moral force of the Aboriginal clan. "The clan", he writes,

"is too complex a reality to be represented clearly in all its complex unity" (Durkheim, 1915: 200). Instead recourse is made to a totemic emblem — "the material form under which the imagination represents this immaterial substance" (Durkheim, 1915: 189). Durkheim points to two layers of simplification. First, the clan is represented "under the visible form of the animal or vegetable which serves as totem" (Durkheim, 1915: 206). This totemic symbol is "simple, definite and easily representable", in contrast to the complexity of the clan itself (Durkheim, 1915: 220). Second, the totemic species itself is represented by simple geometric figures on ritual objects and on the bodies of clan members. In fact "[i]t is the figurative representations ... that have the greatest sanctity" (Durkheim, 1915: 206). The hold these representations have is automatic, a seemingly emotional response based on condensed moral authority rather than on any rational assessment of "useful or injurious effects" (Durkheim, 1915: 207). Simplified symbols serve both to create and maintain collective sentiments.

Broadly similar observations about the simplification of symbols on ritual occasions have been made by a number of writers, but most relevant in this context is the work of Anthony Cohen (1985).[3] From Cohen we learn the important lesson that symbolic simplification lies at the heart of the creation of community. Cohen's (1985: 16) argument is that "attachment or commitment to a common body of symbols" is the basis of community. What members of a community share in common are the key symbols that, in Barthian terms, distinguish them from outsiders. However, as Cohen points out, the sharing of symbols is not the same as the sharing of meaning. The meanings attributed to shared symbols are not uniform within the community of members. There is considerable room for individual interpretation. This variation does not undermine the symbolic construction of community because symbols of community are vague, simple, superficial and unelaborated. Unelaborated symbols are able to accommodate the diversity of meanings that more elaborated or specific symbols could not. Community exists in what has been called "an excess of banalities" (Howell, 2002: 94).

This chapter provides a critically sympathetic exploration of this conceptual framework. There is no doubt that Ban Tiam's great festival is a ritual event, or a series of ritual events, in which simplified symbols of community are mobilised, energised and enacted. It is an exceptional event which "set[s] collectivity in motion" (Olaveson, 2001: 110). The festival asserts the virtue of communal enterprise and marks the community as a sacred entity through the deployment of particular

forms of symbolic representation. However, in the symbolic construction of community, the festival has important limitations. In most general terms, the simplification of symbols becomes unsustainable. Despite the exceptional nature of the festival — and the various ritual efforts to demarcate the sacred — the symbols deployed cannot shake off the diverse meanings that proliferate in day-to-day life. They are entangled symbols. Ultimately this reflects the fact that community is constructed not just symbolically but also through day-to-day social relations and in these relations the simplified symbols of community are an ambiguous and contentious basis for action.

THE SUAN HUAM

The Thai word most usually translated for community (*chumchon*) is infrequently used in Ban Tiam.[4] There is, however, a more general term that appears to encapsulate much of the sentiment and sociality associated with the concept of community. The term is *suan huam*, which can literally be translated as 'the group as a whole', 'common' or 'collective'. As will become clear, there is an array of meanings associated with this term. Nevertheless, there is what might be called a core or simplified meaning underpinning the term's use in relation to, and during, public rituals such as the poi luang. In this simplified sense, stripped of all ambiguity, the suan huam denotes a morally desirable domain of common endeavour. Activities falling within this suan huam domain include, for example, taking up positions on the village's various committees; attending meetings; contributing labour to public works; contributing to the management or maintenance of irrigation systems; assisting with the organisation of public activities; participating in festivals and collective rituals; assisting with food preparation at funerals and other large gatherings; and voluntary work for the various village welfare associations. These suan huam activities are stereotypically locally based and oriented to the village (*ban*, another key term in this constellation of meaning). Activities in the public domain outside the village are only really part of the suan huam to the extent that they involve attempts to assist the village in some way, such as representing the village at a district-level planning meeting. The suan huam also embraces key collective assets such as the temple, not so much because of the way they are managed or used — though this is by no means irrelevant — but because they are seen as physical manifestations of previous collective enterprise. The suan huam is

surrounded semantically by broadly inclusive kinship terms, most commonly *pho mae phi nong* (parents and siblings) a term that is often paired with *ban haw* (our village) to convey a general sense of localised solidarity and interdependence. It is also symbolically close to ideas about tradition (*prapheni*), with many suan huam activities routinely justified in terms of their role in the maintenance of tradition. Conversely, one of the most common ways in which the decline of the suan huam is expressed is in terms of a decline of traditional practices.

The moral desirability of the suan huam is based on its contrast with another key term in local discourse, *suan tua*. This latter term can be literally translated as referring to the personal or the individual, though in Ban Tiam its contrast with suan huam more often refers to matters of the household (ban, but in quite a different sense to ban as village) and the family (*khopkhrua*). There is a strong sense in which suan huam activities are seen as diverting time, labour, money and other resources away from this more private domain. As such, the suan huam has the moral force of altruism, and involvement in suan huam activities is often spoken of as involving some level of sacrifice (*sia sala*). Here there are close parallels with the broader Buddhist emphasis on the moral value of the "selfless giving of gifts" (Tambiah, 1970: 342). Those who make these sorts of sacrifice are regarded as the appropriate occupants of leadership positions within the village. When criticised, village leaders often respond indignantly, referring to the extent of personal sacrifice they have made for the suan huam. In the days leading up to the poi luang, there were regular discussions about who should be the new head of the village women's group, a position that had recently fallen vacant. The two key candidates were assessed explicitly in terms of their history of sacrifice for the suan huam. Both key contenders were 'active in the community' but, in the view of some village opinion leaders, only one of them was regularly involved in a way that involved sacrifice. The preferred, and ultimately successful, candidate was locally renowned for her contribution to the women's group and the health group and was a much sought-after cook at public gatherings such as weddings and funerals. These activities have bought her little personal benefit, as reflected in the parlous state of her own family's economic position. In Durkheim's terms, the suan huam can be seen as a more or less sacred domain that is set off from the profane domain of day-to-day private concerns by the act of sacrifice.

Here we have an understanding of the suan huam in its most formalised sense. Deeper exploration, however, reveals a high degree of fragmentation and ambiguity. Another important way of understanding

the suan huam is in terms of the numerous projects (*khrongkan*) that appear to be the key preoccupation of village politics. These khrongkan are usually local initiatives aimed at mobilising funds for local development activities and are typically justified in terms of their suan huam character. While working in the village, I have become aware of a large number of these projects. Here is a sample: a community shop; a wood-carving project; a music group; support for children with disabilities; lighting for public events; construction of visitor facilities in the nearby national park; a new concrete pavilion for the village territorial spirit; a handicraft centre; uniforms for the women's group to wear on public occasions; new stoves for the temple kitchen; a village history project; dolomite for the paddy fields; funds for the leaders of one of the irrigation groups to travel to the irrigation office to request further funds for renovation of the irrigation system; a toilet for the community shop; the banana group; the proposed village cultural centre; and the community rice mill. These are communal projects and they are regularly referred to as suan huam activities that provide for generalised benefit (*prayort*). The word 'community' (*chumchon*) is sometimes used to make them attractive to potential donors in the government and non-government sectors. But it is crucially important to note that these suan huam projects bring together quite specific coalitions of interests and are the focus of ongoing conflict within the village about the allocation of resources and the distribution of benefits. Most projects are subjected to withering criticism and gossip, including regular allegations of financial mismanagement and misappropriation, by those who support other elements of suan huam activity.

These persistent conflicts often revolve around what might be called the moral economy of the suan huam. As I have shown, in its most simplified domain of meaning, the suan huam refers to activities that benefit a broad group of people, ideally the entire village. However, in its deployment in the world of projects, suan huam refers to more narrow fields of activity and benefit based on often temporary and sometimes unlikely coalitions. In this more fragmented and ephemeral domain, the relationship between suan huam and suan tua also starts to shift and the clear distinction starts to break down. In fact it is broadly accepted that many of those who are active in the suan huam will gain some private benefit for themselves or for their family, kin and close friends. As such, while there is a flow of resources — labour in particular — from the suan tua to the suam huam, there is general acceptance that some level of benefit — cash and goods — will flow back in the other direction. The suan huam here is associated less with

altruistic giving than with calculated exchange. The key is to maintain this exchange at a level that is appropriate and which, in particular, avoids overly explicit advantage at the expense of others. For example, using suan huam funds to support a private money-lending business (with high rates of interest) is generally seen as an inappropriate diversion from the suan huam to the suan tua. Using donated funds to visit a mistress in the city, however, is broadly acceptable, provided sufficient of the funds are paid back in time (perhaps even diverted from another suan huam fund) to avoid overly conspicuous budgetary anomalies. Giving family and friends first choice of donated clothing is probably also acceptable, provided a reasonable proportion of the clothing finds its way to people regarded as deserving of charity. Nevertheless, this is a highly unstable and contested area of public life. In the absence of unambiguous sacrifice, the boundary between the sacred domain of the suan huam and the profane domain of the suan tua becomes blurred. It is at this blurred conceptual frontier that conflict erupts.

Suan Huam Symbolism and the Great Festival

The suan huam was symbolically conspicuous throughout the great festival (poi luang). Prior to the festival the village was cleaned, decorated and widely advertised. An impressive new village sign was erected at its main entrance. In the days leading up to the festival, regular announcements over the village-wide loudspeaker system urged participation in the festival, with the public exhortations constantly resorting to the suan huam language of village, kinship and tradition. During the great festival itself, the collective was expressed and created through the simple fact of assembly: community was created through proximity (Rappaport, 1999: 84; Tambiah, 1970: 57). Large numbers of Ban Tiam's residents assembled both for the consecrating rituals and the public entertainment. The suan huam became clearly evident as a result of physical proximity, with crowds literally jammed into the narrow road leading to the temple and an inescapable cacophony of sound: drumming, highly amplified music and ritual chanting coming from the temple itself. For much of the festival, the cacophony of sound was such that individual conversations were forced to give way to the babble of Durkheimian effervescence. Village traditions were resurrected, learnt and performed. Elaborately dressed village girls performed graceful Thai dances and an orchestra of school children performed northern Thai tunes.

That this was an exceptional time of collective assembly was made clear in a *sor* performance that took place on the first full day of the festival. Sor is a distinctively northern Thai form of musical performance, much appreciated by the audience. It is not unlike rap in its use of repetition, rhyme and irreverence:

> Everyone please come. Come and form processions together. When we don't have festivals, we don't see the faces of our relatives. Some people are trading, some people are working, coming and going. But today we will unite to make merit. We will have music. We will lift the low things up high. We will commit to make merit.... When we don't have a festival, we don't meet. We are drunk with buying and selling and we don't meet. When we have a great festival, we come together to meet .... Working hard for a living, working hard for whiskey. The grandmother is looking after the grandchildren. If we don't have a festival, we don't have merit and we don't have music. Some people are relatives but they don't visit each other. Now we have problems because we don't meet together. We can come together and have fun as brother and sister. Some people don't talk to each other but today we will talk together non stop .... We will be together as brothers and sisters, even though we are not born from the same stomach. We will come and help each other. We love unity.[5]

Later the performer sung the praises of the village, comparing it to places outside where the young people pursue education and do not help to harvest rice, where the girls wear spaghetti-strap tops and show off their pierced navels and the boys dye their hair red. In Ban Tiam, by contrast:

> They have used their tradition to build a new preaching hall. The brothers and sisters from their various houses don't just disappear. They are good clean hosts and help each other as a group to make merit. And they help each other to protect culture, they dance and have beautiful parades. When the faithful come to make donations they don't argue. Their parades are lots of fun. They are very good people. They don't play cards or have cock fights. They don't play 'high-low'. They are a model village. They even have a foreigner who has come to study them.

Figure 6.2 The village maidens preparing the "rice that has never suffered".

The sense of collective moral virtue is expressed most explicitly during the central ritual of the great festival, the all night "opening of the eyes" of the new Buddha images. Many people are present at this event but the village is most vividly represented by the white-clad virgins who prepare the sweetened rice that is presented to the Buddha images, the assembled monks and ultimately the congregation. During the "eye-opening" ritual, the virgins are physically demarcated by a temporary fence surrounding the area where the rice preparation takes place. No one else can enter this area or even pass anything into it. Here the suan huam is represented in its most simplified, pure and detached form. Donning white robes, the young girls temporarily enter into — in fact they are said to be ordained (*buat*) — a clearly demarcated community of world renouncers. Unencumbered by sexual relationships — or, on this night, the worldly concerns of menstruation — they are well placed to express the moral value of altruistic giving. The night is long and the work is difficult and their disinterested sacrifice is clearly evident. The rice they prepare is referred to as the "rice that has never suffered", sweetened sacred rice that is, like the virgins themselves, detached from

the day-to-day dealings of production, distribution and consumption. Unlike most other rice, this sweet rice is consumed communally, uniting the congregation in a sacred communion that, as one villager told me, dates from the time of the Buddha himself.

These, then, are some of the ways in which the great festival represents and enacts Ban Tiam's suan huam. The village is constructed in terms of a morally valued common purpose. A sacred state of collective enterprise is set apart from the profane world of individual, day-to-day pursuit. But a large and complex festival like this requires considerable planning and coordination, quite apart from the effort involved in actually achieving the temple renovations. Here Durkheim's model of a seemingly spontaneous and clear-cut transition from the profane time of economic pursuit to the sacred time of ceremony becomes more symbolically complex. As recent analysts of ritual as performance have argued, there are important logistical challenges involved in staging effective and compelling ritual (Alexander, 2004). The great festival faced two key challenges: the mobilisation of labour and the mobilisation of funds. Though exhortations rich with the symbolism of the suan huam's disinterested virtue have a role to play in this mobilisation, these resource challenges were met primarily through administrative elaboration, drawing on idioms and practices much more resonant with the suan huam's broader set of project-related meanings. Communal ritual may well be "a mechanism that periodically converts the obligatory into the desirable" (Olaveson, 2001: 98) but the shadow of obligation is ever-present as simplified symbols become entangled with the complexities of day-to-day politics.

A brief consideration of the days immediately before the festival provides a good indication of the scale of the labour mobilisation challenge. During this period I observed the following activities: the temple itself was elaborately decorated both inside the preaching hall and outside; a supplementary water supply system was installed to cater for the many guests; flags were placed along both sides of the village's main road; a new village sign was erected; banners advertising the festival were prepared and strung up in other villages; numerous items of ritual paraphernalia were prepared, usually requiring the careful cutting, folding and pinning of banana leaves, flowers and other raw materials; large numbers of presents were purchased and wrapped for the festival's distinguished guests; two large stages were erected outside the temple gates; loudspeaker systems were installed; the village's drains were hosed out; vacant blocks of land in the vicinity of the temple were stripped

of all vegetation to provide for car parking; "beautiful" electric lights to illuminate the car parks were installed; temporary fences and signs were erected to direct guests; members of the village women's group went to Chiang Mai to buy supplies and disposable plates for the food that would be served at the temple; practice sessions for dancers and musicians were held late into the night; costumes for performers were prepared and those who would be applying make-up to the dancers were carefully trained.

The festival also required significant financial resources and each household in the village, regardless of financial position, was required to contribute 400 baht. This was a cause of some resentment, particularly among poorer members of the community, though in the end it was reported that only one "stingy" household had failed to contribute. The levy was justified by the village head as being considerably lower than that levied by other villages on similar occasions and also as being barely sufficient to cover the various costs of staging the festival. A large donation was also made by the richest man in the village, a substantial landowner and the district's representative in the provincial assembly. The great festival was timed to take place just after the election for the new provincial assembly, in which he was seeking re-election.

The mobilisation of labour and finances was achieved through a series of committees. At a village meeting held about two weeks before the festival, no fewer than 12 committees were formed. Despite the fact that there were only about 40 people at the meeting, a total of 72 people were recruited onto the various committees, illustrating the mobilising ambition of this bureaucratic procedure (the village has about 120 households). Committees included: the financial planning committee; the committee for Buddha images; the electricity and loudspeaker committee; the advertising committee; the law and order committee; no less than four financial committees; the hospitality committee; the cleaning up committee; and the committee for coordinating food and drinks. Of the 72 committee members, only four were women, three of them making up the food and drinks committee. This process of committee formation, though in this case rather elaborate, is typical of the mode of operation in the suan huam's project domain. Here the moral desirability of the simplified suan huam domain is less relevant than the ability of committee members to use their personal networks and influence to draw people into their various areas of responsibility. There is nothing inevitable about this mobilisation. It is not uncommon for key people to withdraw from aspects of public festival activity.

In fact this appears to be an important mode of expressing displeasure, not with the collective writ large (the simplified suan huam) but with specific people in it. For example, at a much smaller festival held a few months before the great festival, one of the women most skilled at creative handicrafts — essential for the production of ritual paraphernalia — refused to participate as a result of her husband's dispute with the village headman about illegal timber cutting.

This bureaucratisation of ritual preparation comprehensively entangles the simplified symbolism of the suan huam with its more fragmented and contested meanings. The challenge of marking off a morally desirable suan huam becomes all the more difficult as a result of the resource mobilisation required for the staging of a successful festival. The problem is that the collective must be mobilised before it can be ritually enacted. Attentions, energies and passions come to be focused on the suan huam as a domain of compulsion, negotiation, political promotion and budgetary shenanigans. This bureaucratic elaboration provides numerous opportunities for conflict and for elaboration of the persistent discourse about the appropriate balance between the suan huam and the suan tua.

At the meeting held to form the various poi luang committees, a bitter dispute erupted as to how some of the festival's expenses were to be met. At one stage Jakkrit spoke up saying that his wife and a number of her friends were teaching traditional dancing to a group of young girls who would perform at the festival. He asked that they be allocated some funds to buy cosmetics for the girls and perhaps provide them with a small amount of pocket money. He suggested that this money could be provided from the funds that the village had received as compensation for trucks passing through the village from an illegal sand-mining venture in the adjacent national park. This question was directed primarily to Attajak, who was the chairperson of the village's natural resources committee. Attajak is a highly influential but controversial figure in the village: he is one of its richest men as a result of his successful farming, shopkeeping and money-lending activities; he occupies a key position on the temple committee; and he is a key political rival of the current headman. Attajak responded to the request by stating that the members of the natural resources committee had taken the initiative in relation to requesting the compensation money and had divided the money between themselves as payment for their efforts. Aranya, one of the dance teachers, responded that the villagers on the natural resources committee had been selected to work for the

suan huam and that there had been no talk of payment at the time of their selection. Someone from the back of the room added: "again and again the money is gone, there is nothing we can do". As tempers rose, various people urged Aranya and Jakkrit to drop the matter and the meeting soon moved on to the selection of the great festival committee members. But an important statement had been made: Attajak had asserted the right of those who worked for the suan huam to receive payment for their efforts. Coming from the man who, as a result of his position on the temple committee, would be managing the funds raised during the great festival, this was a fundamentally destabilising statement. The morally valued altruism of the simplified suan huam domain was, in a sense, contaminated by its contact with the world of projects, budgets and faction-ridden committees.

THE TEMPLE AND THE ABBOT

It is an anthropological truism that the rural Thai temple is a key expression of the collective identity of the village community (Moerman, 1966; Ingersoll, 1966: 68; Somboon, 1977: 20) and there is no doubt that Ban Tiam's temple was the symbolic focus of the great festival. The temple is a concrete representation of the suan huam. The various buildings in the temple compound are substantially the product of suan huam labour and financial contribution, with the donations of the faithful carefully noted on the numerous signs that dot the temple compound. The temple is, quite literally, inscribed with the sacrificial flow of resources from the suan tua to the suan huam. Its prosperity not only symbolises the suan huam but is also an explicit indexical measure of it. For the duration of the festival, the temple was elaborately decorated with banners, flags, rosettes and ritual offerings. The roads leading to it were lined with decorative flags and its gardens adorned with flowering plants. The open space in front of the temple compound was the site of the major public assemblies and the communal property stored at the temple — cooking utensils, tables, chairs, canvas awnings, public address systems and electric lighting — was on conspicuous display. In brief, the great festival marks, celebrates and enacts the central position of the village temple in suan huam endeavour.

The abbot (Tu Sonthi)[6] is the primary representative of the temple in village affairs. Obviously he paid a crucial role in both organising the renovations and the festival itself. This management role sits easily with the suan huam ideal of altruistic effort for the common good. The

formal name adopted by the abbot when he entered the monkhood reflects, through carefully chosen linguistic referents, his alignment with the community-wide objective of development. This alignment and the extent of the abbot's sacrifice for the suan huam was emphasised during the *sor* performance:

> Tu Sonthi is a virtuous and kind man. He is the ecclesiastical head for the sub-district. He has the patience to develop this temple. Even when it's rainy or windy, he does not give up. He has many followers from many villages and they respect him highly. He lives in the temple and uses donations to develop it. He thinks about construction and renovation. And he doesn't take any money at all out of the temple. He has many followers from other villages and cities and is the abbot of the temple. He doesn't concern himself with commerce. He is a man with a lot of money. But he uses the money for the renovation of the temple. He doesn't take the money for any other purpose. He uses it to restore the preaching hall of the temple.

In this simplified account, Tu Sonthi is a personification of suan huam virtue. However, this is a formalistic and fragile construction that bears little scrutiny. In fact the abbot is a divisive and controversial figure. The recent history of this dates to Sonthi's elevation to the position of abbot. This followed the sudden death of the previous abbot, an elderly monk said to have had considerable sacred power. There were two contenders for his position, Sonthi and Phaithoon. In the normal course of events, Phaithoon would have become abbot. He was, from all reports, well liked in the village, though at the same time considered somewhat unusual because of his effeminate manner and his particular skill in what were considered to be feminine handicrafts. But Phaithoon's elevation was scuttled by an extraordinary event. When the temple committee was cleaning out the deceased abbot's room, a pair of women's underpants was apparently found under his pillow. Accusations — perhaps encouraged by Sonthi — were directed against Phaithoon. The central accusation was that he had murdered the former abbot by bringing his sacred head into close proximity with the spiritually defiling underwear. The incident split the village along kinship lines. Sonthi's kinship connections were impeccable. His father's brother was a previous headman, as was his paternal grandfather. And his father's sister was (and still is) married to the sub-district head — the same man, in fact, who was the main donor for

the poi luang. Not surprisingly, Sonthi triumphed. Phaithoon was persuaded by his family to leave for a temple in another district, where he remains to this day. He visited the village during the great festival but played no part in the main public rituals.

Concerns about Sonthi's controversial elevation resonate with more recent concerns about his behaviour as abbot. Among some sections of the village there is considerable gossip about Sonthi's personal habits: his abrupt and hectoring manner and his liking for cigarettes, alcohol and dubious DVDs. However, the more persistent concern is that Sonthi uses his quintessentially suan huam position for personal gain and to enrich his immediate family, who are already affluent and well connected. Suspicious were aroused by, for example, anomalies in the receipts produced for temple expenses. Some villagers suggested that the abbot and members of the temple committee were cooperating in diverting temple funds into their own pockets. There were also quietly spoken claims that Sonthi was involved in the trading of timber illegally cut from the nearby national park. Around the time of the great festival a number of other stories and complaints were circulating. One related to the temple photocopier, for which Sonthi charged two baht per page, despite that fact that it had been purchased with village donations. Even more scandalous was the rumour that Sonthi had used temple funds to install a closed-circuit television in some of the buildings of the temple compound, something considered an unnecessary luxury and an indulgence in personal play-things. When the young women gathered at the temple just before the great festival to wrap the presents that were to be given to visiting monks and other dignitaries, there was hushed talk of being careful not to steal anything as the abbot would be watching. One of the women stood and pointed her bottom towards an imaginary camera and, accompanied by much laughter, invited the abbot to take a good look. During the festival a rumour also emerged that Sonthi would be taking a payment of 10,000 baht for his role in officiating at the festival. This was seen as particularly unacceptable in the light of the financial hardship the festival had imposed on some households within the village. The village headman remonstrated with me when he heard that I had donated 2,000 baht to assist with the purchase of robes for some of the visiting monks. He suggested that my money would have been better spent on one of his projects, in this case the purchase of uniforms for the village soccer team.

So, at one level, the abbot symbolises the virtue of collective enterprise and personal sacrifice for the common good. This is the nature of his role, a role that is symbolically marked by bodily transformation (the shaved head), clothing (the monk's robe) and the outward trappings of a monastic lifestyle. However, this simplified and unelaborated representation starts to unravel when aspects of the person, rather than the role, are emphasised. These alternative meanings strain the credibility of the simplified symbolic construction. These alternative meanings regularly circulate within the village, but they gained particular salience on the occasion of the great festival because it focused attention on issues of resource mobilisation, budgetary management and the abbot's control of communal property. While the great festival celebrates and consecrates the collective effort involved in renovating the temple, it also strengthens the view that the temple is an unworthy site of communal enterprise and an unworthy recipient of private donation. Its simplified status as a suan huam institution is compromised by the view that the abbot has breached the subtle moral economy of exchange between collective benefit and private gain.

UPAKHUT

A focus on the figure of Upakhut provides a rather different perspective on the great festival. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Upakhut is represented by a small stone that is taken from the river and installed at the temple to watch over the festival. Upakhut is a complex figure with a number of different mythical explanations.[7] The complexity of this symbolism appears to be inversely proportional to the simplicity of his physical representation (Davis, 1984). In northeast Thailand, Upakhut is sometimes referred to as a swamp spirit (*phi*) (Sparkes, 2005: 185), though I have rarely heard him referred to as a phi in Ban Tiam. Nor is he ever referred to as a *jaw* (lord), the term used for more powerful tutelary spirits. But he does have close relations with spirits given that his usual home is in a natural setting. This setting is seen as giving him the power of coolness, which is bought into the village to counter the potentially disruptive 'heat' generated by the great festival. Two forest spirits accompany him into the village and, when he is summoned from the river, a small offering is made to the territorial spirit (*jaw thi*) in the vicinity, requesting permission to take him. It was no accident that Upakhut was taken from the river adjacent

to a large and old tree, the typical home for tutelary spirits. Other occasional offerings made to Upakhut in Ban Tiam are very similar to the offerings sometimes made to *phi khun nam* (river guardians) in northern Thailand.

However, while Upakhut is clearly associated with the spiritual forces of nature, he is more readily associated with the domesticated and civilised power of Buddhism. One woman made the important comment that "Ban Tiam is only a small village with one temple, unlike the city of Chiang Mai where there are many temples, so Upakhut is needed to come and offer his protection." According to one villager, the close relationship between Upakhut and the Buddha is signalled by the similarity of sound and rhythm in their names: *phra upakhut* and *phra phutthajaw*. Most often, however, the link is made by suggesting that Upakhut is, in fact, the son of the Buddha. The broad outline of the story of his conception is that the Buddha was bathing in the river and some of his semen came to be ingested by a water creature that, as a result, gave birth to Upakhut. In most local versions, the water creature is a fish of no particular type, though some suggest that the creature was in fact a *nguak*, perhaps best translated as 'mermaid'. There are different explanations for how the Buddha's semen came to be in the water, though all avoid any suggestion of the Buddha's active involvement in the conception. Most suggest that the semen just "dropped" (*tok long*) into the water. A more refined version, recounted to me both by a monk and by a villager who had spent a significant period as monk, was that while he was sleeping (and dreaming) the Buddha emitted semen onto his robe. When he washed the robe in the river, a fish ate the semen and became pregnant.

In order to appreciate the significance of Upakhut, it is necessary to consider the extra-local character of the poi luang festival. This may seem to something of a diversion, but it is essential in order to approach a more nuanced understanding of the nature of modern northern Thai community. As I have indicated, the central ritual of the poi luang festival is the night-long 'opening of the eyes' of the Buddha. During this ritual, the Buddha images are quite literally charged with sacred power. As Swearer (2004: 78) suggests, the ceremony involves the transformation of a material image into the form of the Buddha. This charging is achieved by the chanting of sacred texts. In order to maximise the sacred potency of the chanting, monks from a wide network of temples are invited to participate. Special letters of invitation (*tikanimon*) are despatched through the district and provincial temple

networks, some nominating esteemed monks whose attendance would be desirable. In some cases attendance is considered automatic because of personal connections between the abbots or an established history of reciprocal visiting. Local sacred potency is established by drawing in sources of potency from outside the village.

This external ritual orientation is matched in other aspects of the festival. For many villagers, the status of Ban Tiam is expressed in its ability to attract large numbers of people to the festival. In the days leading up to the festival I was regularly told that there would be huge numbers of guests "from near and far" coming to help the local villagers make merit and to join in the festivities. While one of the key terms highlighting the suan huam dimension is *phi nong ban haw* (brothers and sisters of our village), a sense of external connection is conveyed by the broader but similar *yat phi nong* (relatives):

> The festival is the blessing of Ban Tiam. Our relatives from far away will come and join us to make merit. Anything not good has to be fixed. Places to stay and things to eat have to be prepared. This is how we welcome them. The food has to be ready. Relatives will be coming from other sub-districts, from other districts, from other villages. There will be relatives from Chiang Dao, even Fang. Everyone's relatives have to come and join us because it is a really big occasion for making merit. It is a very famous festival.

One of the most important manifestations of this external network was the arrival of numerous *hua wat*, probably best translated as the 'representatives of temples', from other villages. In the days before the festival, I was told that the village could expect perhaps 300 hua wat to come and make merit. The system was explained in reciprocal terms: Ban Tiam villagers had participated in the festivals of those temples so they could be expected to reciprocate the honour. As it happened, over 100 hua wat came to the festival, arriving in noisy groups carrying the money-tree offerings aloft, dancing, clapping, beating drums and joining in the festivities. Some provided their own performances on the stages erected in front of Ban Tiam's temple. Most carried banners announcing the name of their temple. There were many representatives from neighbouring villages and districts and a number of temples from Chiang Mai city were also represented. There was a strong sense that the most distant temples were the more important and the local welcoming dances were organised primarily for the temples from other districts. As one women said, "we don't need to dance to welcome the temple from the village across the fields".[8]

Of course these external linkages are not without risks and it was well recognised that ritual effervescence may result in an explosion of the volatile combinations bought together. There was also the potential for the fame and reputation of the great festival to attract "bad people who will make trouble". A particular concern was that fights would break out among the young men, especially members of the "gangs" for which Chiang Mai and its surrounding districts have become famous. There was also the risk of theft. Theft is not unknown in the day-to-day life of the village and those suspected of theft are subject to enduring gossip, but the presence of large numbers of people unevenly integrated into kin networks and moral codes greatly heightens the risk. My host warned me many times that I should keep my shoulder bag, containing my money, camera and other effects, on my person at all times during the festival. There were also more mundane logistical concerns: that food would be sufficient; that domestic water supplies could cope with the influx of guests; that parking of cars would be orderly; and that the weather for the festival would be satisfactory. With the large number of people assembled and the enormous amount of electrical equipment set up outdoors, rain would have been highly disruptive.[9]

So, once again it is evident that the ideal symbolic state of the festival was entangled with the logistical realities of staging it. But how does all this relate to the figure of Upakhut and my broader concern with the symbolic construction of community?

Upakhut is an infrequent visitor to the village. All of the villagers questioned stated that he is only invited to the village for these great festivals. Some reported that offerings are made to him on other occasions, especially when the full moon falls on a Wednesday, but these are small-scale and essentially private offerings undertaken in the river at some distance from the village. But his role at the prestigious great festival is crucial and without him the festival is considered to be "not appropriate". His primary role is to protect the peace and security of the festival (*raksa ngan*). He is a sacred entity (*sing saksit*) that possesses coolness (*khwam rom yen*) and he brings this coolness from his cool and watery home to the village itself for the duration of the festival. This protective role appears to be widespread (Sparkes, 2005: 186). The legendary charter for this role derives from the Sanskrit account of Upakhut's role in subduing Mara at a festival organised by the great king Asoka (Strong, 1991: Chapter 5). None of the villagers in Ban Tiam make specific reference to this story, though it is present in

northern Thai iconography and legend. However, they do repeatedly emphasise Upakhut's role in maintaining peace and harmony at the festival. The spirits that accompany Upakhut play a similar role. There is a real concern that the reputation of the festival will attract spirits from far and wide, who will want to come and join the celebrations and make mischief or disturb (*ropkuan*) the festival. To prevent this, two representatives of the spirits are specifically invited, with the declaration that "this village already has two spirits so others are not welcome".

There are two important points to be highlighted in relation to Upakhut. First, in many respects Upakhut symbolically underlines the weakness and fragility of the local suan huam. Despite the constant symbolic emphasis on harmony, goodwill, and collective merit-making, there is an underlying recognition that the suan huam is fragile and that the time of collective assembly is a time of heightened vulnerability. Of course, attempts are made to attribute the problematic aspects of assembly to a clearly demarcated outside, to troublemakers from those other places where girls "expose their navels and boys dye their hair red". However, this demarcation is unsustainable, precisely because the success of the festival depends on mobilising external networks to assist in the recharging of local power and potency. The Buddha images and the village are charged primarily by external power, not by the moral force of the local collectivity. So, in order to secure protection during this period of heightened vulnerability, the villagers of Ban Tiam draw on powerful entities whose usual home is well outside the village. Upakhut is invited from the river but his real home lies in a great palace beneath the sea. And the spirits who join him are unambiguously forest spirits, covered in filth and behaving in ways that mark them as lying outside the domain of the village. Ban Tiam's own territorial spirits — and there is no shortage of them — play no significant role in the great festival.

Second, while Upakhut underlines the hazards and fragility of the suan huam, he is perhaps the most effectively simplified and idealised representation of it. Upakhut works for the common good with no hint of earthly reward or entanglement. If only, for the purpose of the great festival, Ban Tiam could have an abbot like Upakhut. He lives alone in a watery home, a palace perhaps, but clearly an other-worldly one. He possesses the detached coolness of the forest meditator. He is installed in a modest pavilion with the simple possessions of a monk. He does not receive elaborate offerings, only a small daily serving of rice. At the end of the festival he is returned to the river to resume his

solitary life. In other words, Upakhut represents an ideal of altruistic effort for collective, rather than private, benefit. The irony is that the central idealised meanings of the suan huam are most effectively represented by a loner, a hermit who lives in the sea.

THE DEVIL IN THE DETAIL

In Ban Tiam, the local concept that comes closest in meaning to the English-language term 'community' is *suan huam*. In its simplified form, this term represents altruistic sacrifice for the common good as opposed to the more interested activities of the private suan tua domain. As a vague and simplified symbolic representation, the suan huam encourages a sense of localised belonging that forms a basis for various types of cooperative enterprise. Suan huam symbolism, most concretely in the form of the temple itself, was regularly deployed and enacted during the great festival, which was morally justified as a triumph of collective endeavour over more individualistic pursuits. Clearly, the great festival contributes to the construction of what we call community.

Nevertheless, this construction is highly problematic and must contend with an array of alternative meanings and interpretations. A mundane accounting for this difficulty would be to suggest that the ideas symbolically expressed in a ritual such as the great festival conflict with the pragmatic realities of day-to-day life. This is true but unremarkable and provides no explanation. All rituals involve some demarcation from the domain of the everyday and, indeed, many in the Durkheimian tradition would see this as fundamental to the nature of ritual. In fact, the key reason that the great festival struggles to construct compelling community is that the contrast between the ritual and the everyday is not strong enough. The main problem is that the simplified symbols of community deployed during the great festival are fundamentally entangled with the complex domain of the everyday. Effectively deployed, simplifying symbols are compelling but they are undermined by elaboration. The dancing troupe of young girls is a lovely representation of the harmony and virtue of collective enterprise but when this symbolism becomes entangled in a bitter debate about who should pay for the young girls' make-up, a less harmonious tangle of disruptive meaning emerges. Similarly, the role of abbot is a fine representation of leadership, development and collective benefit but when rumours circulate about the use of great festival funds for

personal benefit, ideal roles are forgotten and memories of knickers, photocopiers and closed circuit televisions are all too readily recalled. In the symbolic domain, the sacred relies on simplification and unelaborated imagery. The devil is in the detail.

One important constraint on the great festival's symbolic endeavour is that it was a very elaborate festival that required significant and complex resource mobilisation. Alexander's (2004) work on the "cultural pragmatics" of ritual as performance can assist in understanding this constraint. He notes that the "practical pragmatics of performance" are "different from the cultural logic of texts" (Alexander, 2004: 530). The great festival cannot be read simply in terms of the relationships between various symbols existing in a clearly demarcated sacred domain. The symbolic superstructure has to be related to the ritual's practical, material base. An elaborate exercise in resource mobilisation like the great festival provides an unstable basis for the simplified symbolic construction of community. Resources inevitably get caught up in the contested moral economy of compromise between collective and individual pursuits. Quite simply, community is stretched and strained under its own organisational weight.

Ritual events such as the poi luang are often seen as a central feature of traditional Tai community. So what does the case of Ban Tiam tell us about the nature of this traditional practice? First, it underlines the point, also made by High (Chapter 5), that communal ritual practice has strong external orientations. The potency and auspiciousness of the poi luang's localised display of the suan huam depends on drawing in people, donations and spiritual power from a widely dispersed ritual network. While accounts of traditional Tai community often point to the primacy of local cultural and economic resources, the poi luang highlights the importance of external connections in local expressions of belonging. Second, the messy micro-politics of the poi luang shows that ritual events often seen as representing classic Tai values of solidarity and common interest are also occasions of dispute, contest and rivalry. They are occasions for the exercise of power and the expression of political difference. Accounts of traditional Tai community capture the symbolic simplification of ritual occasions but often fail to capture the political complexities of their actual implementation.

The case of Ban Tiam also demonstrates that 'traditional' ritual occasions are by no means displaced by modernity. Ban Tiam is well integrated into global and regional market networks. Local livelihoods

are dominated by cash-crop production, wage labour and government employment. However, this modern livelihood orientation co-exists with a desire to participate in simplified ritual statements about the desirability of the suan huam. In contemporary Ban Tiam, the simplified moral discourse of the suan huam retains its salience, just as in broader Thai public life the modern discourse of 'community' (*chumchon*) shows no sign of abating. The extroverted template of village ritual copes readily with the even more spatially dispersed networks of employment, education and political patronage that characterise the modern era. In fact, given this dispersal, the simplified and nostalgic appeal of ritual assembly is potentially even more salient and the resources that can be mobilised via external networks provide for an even more elaborate event.

There are also historically specific reasons why the symbolic production of community is so challenging. As earlier chapters in this volume have demonstrated, over the past few decades the symbolism of community has been comprehensively linked to diverse forms of official and alternative development discourse. No grant can be made without a committee; no resources can be allocated without a group; no donation made without a consensus. The suan huam has become the preferred symbolic vehicle for development, a vehicle that the residents in Ban Tiam and elsewhere have enthusiastically embraced. In this process, the sacredness of community has been diluted. In their, quite justified, focus on livelihood improvement, development workers have overlooked the fact that community operates best as a specialised form of ritual communication, promoting sentiments of belonging through simplified and un-entangled statements about the moral virtue of the collective. Those interested in promoting community would do well to leave it alone — put it back in the river and let it return to its palace under the sea.

Part III
Negotiated States

7

Living within the State: A Dormitory Community in Central Laos

Sarinda Singh

Throughout the Tai world, states have played an important role in the creation of community. As other contributors in this volume have demonstrated, state agencies have introduced administrative structures that have solidified the 'village community' and they have used these artificially bounded units as a basis for development intervention. Various state agencies, often working alongside domestic NGOs and international aid providers, have also promoted a discourse of community in which local cooperation and communal solidarity are seen as underpinning sustainable development. In this chapter, my aim is to take this discussion of the relationship between state and community one step further by examining the creation of community within the state itself. In Laos, the state relies upon a particular form of bureaucratic community to achieve national administrative objectives, especially in remote districts where the state has a relatively weak presence. However, there are risks involved in this strategy because these internal communities can also reveal the extent to which the state does not effectively implement its policies or adequately support its own staff. Communities within the state entail contradictory possibilities for modern Tai bureaucracies.

An important starting point is the recognition that states, like all institutions, are subject to negotiation. Anthropology delights in the contradictions that emerge in the interstices where state ideologies

meet diverse practices, and in the compromises that are necessary for, and challenge, state function (Li, 1999; Herzfeld, 2005). Studies of the state have been hampered, however, by what Herzfeld (2005: 372–3) refers to as an "absence of an ethnographic sensibility toward the state functionaries". He highlights the need to consider government officials and "thicken" the "abstract representation of the state", but his apt critique suffers from depersonalising bureaucrats as either "corrupt or unimaginative" or as "servants of the people". It is surprising that informative explorations of the state — though noting the absence of a "singular state vision" (Li, 2005: 388) — have neglected to identify the significance of government officials' ideas about the state, especially given the unique insiders' view that officials have to offer. Perhaps this oversight arises from an assumption, albeit at times well-founded, that government officials merely reiterate state policy (Heyman, 1999: 12; but see Li, 1999).

In reality, government officials are not just mouthpieces for the state apparatus. Officials are within the state and promote its policies, yet at the same time, as individuals and groups, they are also engaged in their own negotiations with the state. The challenge then becomes how to elicit officials' perspectives that are less constrained by state rhetoric. Engagement with officials outside the formal workspace is one way to achieve this aim. There are spaces and times that may be more transparent, or less clouded by state rhetoric, than others. In many instances, it may be difficult to access such spaces. In Laos, however, an opportunity is presented by the practice of providing dormitories for government officials who migrate to rural areas because of their work. Due to this social context, the dormitory community is associated with more "transparent moments" (Heyman, 1999: 14) than the office and thus provides a space where alternative interpretations of the state can occasionally be proffered by those who are within it.

This chapter explores the lives of low-ranking forestry officials residing in a dormitory in Nakai, an upland district in central Laos. Though existing only because of the state, the dormitory is not a mere extension of the office workspace. The dormitory is where people eat, sleep, socialise and spend much of their personal lives. It offers a rare opportunity for an alternative perspective on the Lao state, but researching the state cannot be done just through brief forays into these less official spaces. More informal and personal spaces are not inherently transparent. In order to capture fleeting moments of transparency, it was necessary to reside at the dormitory, sharing the beds

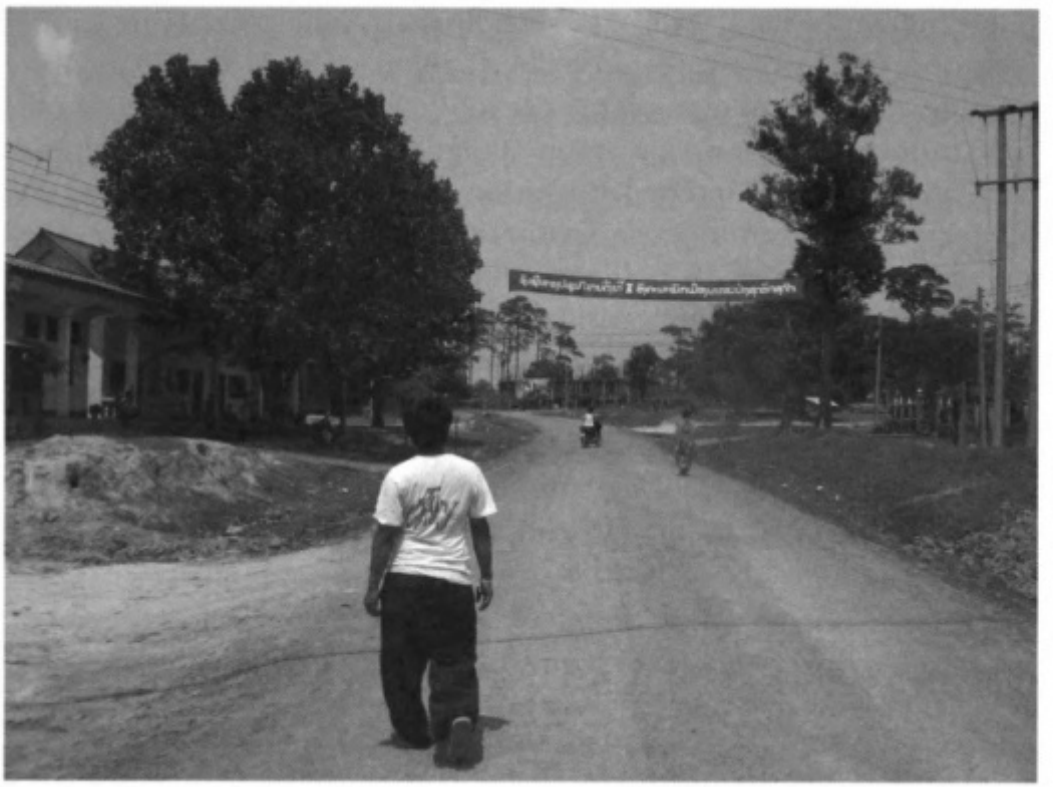

Figure 7.1 The Nakai forestry dormitory (left) is a central space in the lives of marginal officials.

with the women officials, eating, bathing, cooking, washing clothes, going to the market and festivals together and sharing daily experiences with the other residents. By being a part of the everyday, I could become closer to belonging and only through this participation could I gain access to the community. Shared living in the dormitory is thus a key to being able to access the diverse and often conflicting perspectives government officials have to offer on the Lao state.[1]

Dormitories have long been sites for study into social processes, particularly in psychology, education and labour studies (for example, Moos and Moos, 1976; Rigg, 2005; Smith, 2003). Yet there has been little attention paid to dormitories for government officials, partly due to their scarcity in comparison to dormitories for students and factory workers. In Laos, rural dormitories for officials are an integral component of the bureaucracy and are encountered in many districts throughout the country. Such dormitories for officials are signs of the expanding bureaucracy in the rural periphery. The importance of dormitories is especially pronounced in less developed and more remote districts

(Government of Laos, 2003). In such districts, state officials are usually recruited from outside because local populations lack the requisite training and government salaries are too low to entice prospective officials from elsewhere unless accommodation is provided. Dormitories facilitate a form of internal migration and colonisation. Despite the importance of dormitories in facilitating state expansion in Laos, they are never mentioned in policy documents, seldom identified by distinguishing signs and rarely visited by non-residents. Yet in the lives of resident officials, dormitories can be central, providing a space outside the formal office for migrants who are separated from their families to form social networks with others who share similar backgrounds and concerns (Mills, 1999a; Smith and Pun, 2006). The dormitory community formed by marginal forestry officials in Nakai reveals the strengths and weaknesses of the Lao state.

A DORMITORY COMMUNITY WITHIN THE STATE

The combination of the terms 'dormitory' and 'community' in my account may appear to be redundant or even self-contradictory. The latter connotation was apparent in anthropology in the past and continues in studies of urban planning and housing policy where the terms "dormitory suburbs" or "dormitory towns" are still used as a negative contrast to desired communities (Arensberg, 1961: 257; Prichard, 2000; Lalloo, 1999). Labour studies have also tended to regard workers' dormitories as a means for employers to exert greater coercion and control, as well as a place for migrant women to be lured into prostitution (Rigg, 2005: 160), though recent work is challenging such assumptions (Smith and Pun, 2006). The case of rural dormitories for officials in Laos further challenges the presumed opposition between dormitories and communities.

The significance of the Nakai forestry dormitory lies in its simultaneous location within the state yet partially separated from the public workspace of the office. The community formed by dormitory residents is not imagined in opposition to the state but it does permit conversations that could not be voiced in the office setting. This is especially so because the dormitory space is most important for the least empowered residents. The district officials residing in the dormitory embody the margins of the Lao state as they are the lowest tier in the bureaucracy extending from the national to the provincial and down to the district level. This bureaucratic marginality is mirrored in the location of these

officials in the rural periphery, a locale where the central government in Vientiane is weakest (Government of Laos, 2003). While this discussion does not attempt to tease apart the influences of the bureaucracy and the Lao People's Revolutionary Party in the functioning of the Lao state, it is pertinent that there is considerable congruence between administrative and party hierarchies (Stuart-Fox, 2004). The most marginal officials are also those excluded from membership in the party.[2] Furthermore, my emphasis is on young, low-ranking officials, particularly women, who are less commonly involved in forestry.[3] There are distinct parallels here with Mayes' account (Chapter 8) of Vietnamese Lao members of a scooter club in urban Laos. Acts of community, whether in a scooter club or dormitory, can provide a social and cultural framework for coping with ethnic or bureaucratic marginality.

The Nakai dormitory for forestry officials (*ho phak phanakngan pa mai*) is a neat whitewashed concrete building at one edge of the Nakai district centre in Khammouane Province and located a short walk away from the District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO) or "office" (*hongkan*) where the dormitory residents worked. At the time of my fieldwork, the Nakai district centre had a population of around 1,500 people (NTPC, 2004). District dormitories are organised by line ministries rather than one dormitory being provided for all officials in a given district. In Nakai, separate dormitories were provided for officials from agriculture, finance and health, while a dormitory for education officials was under construction. In early 2005 there were just over 25 officials staying at the forestry dormitory, two of whom were women.[4] The women share a single bedroom, sleeping on two beds pushed together, while men are allocated space in one of eight rooms (Figure 7.2). Low-ranking, younger and newly arrived men are housed in rooms with three to five others. Higher-ranking and long-term residents share smaller rooms with just one other man. While the composition of the dormitory changes regularly — as new officials arrive, former residents relocate or as occasional visitors stay during work-related trips — there is a core of older, long-term residents who have been in Nakai for five or more years.

Understanding officials' lives in the Nakai forestry dormitory benefits from notions of community, namely, sharing lives through localised interpersonal relations as well as sharing mutually respected symbols of belonging. While the sharing of lives and a sense of belonging could be applied to a diverse array of social groups, such ideas of community are regularly framed in opposition to bureaucratic structures. This builds

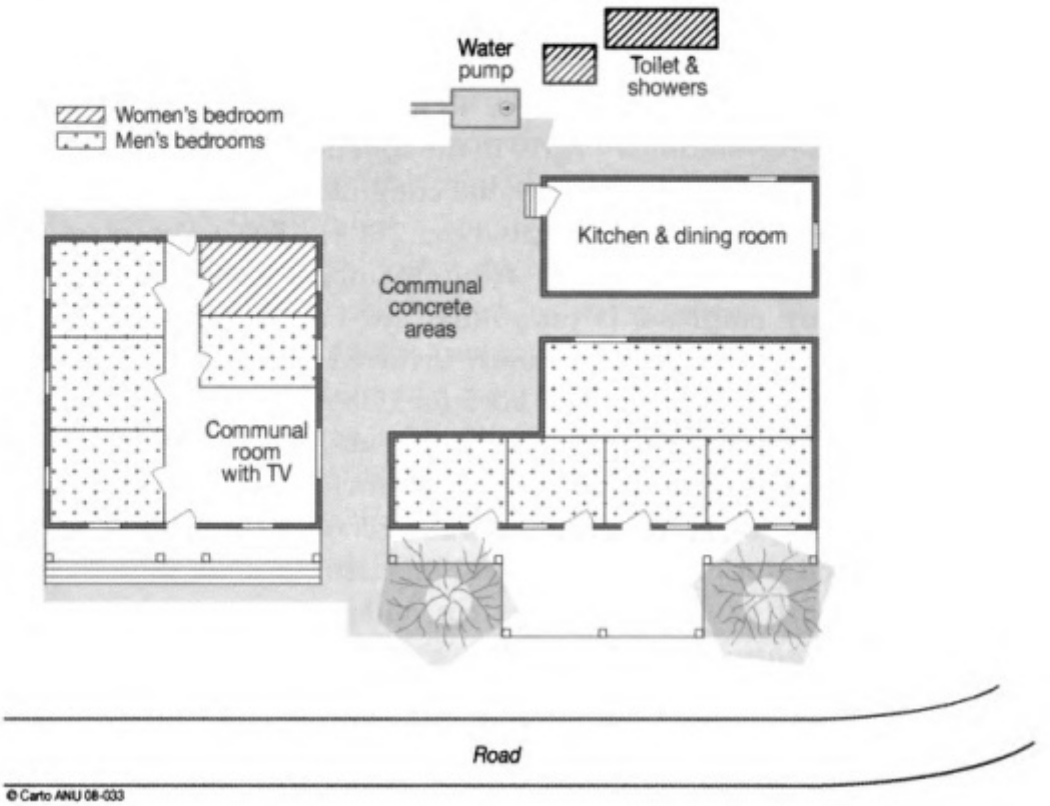

Figure 7.2 Floor plan of the forestry dormitory in Nakai.

on the state-society dichotomy, an idealised contrast between small, localised, kin-based communities and the impersonal nation-state. The forestry dormitory in Nakai, while occupied by government officials who are representatives of the state, evinced features that are often associated with notions of community, daily activities being by necessity largely communal.[5] For instance, lunch and dinner are prepared by women and low-ranking men, one young man yelling out from the kitchen when the meal is ready to gather others from the television room or bedrooms to "come and eat". Meals are eaten with dormitory residents sitting together on a mat on the floor of the common room next to the kitchen. As in family homes, dormitory residents each have a spoon but share bowls of soup and containers of sticky rice while exchanging jokes, stories and advice. Communal living is also apparent in the shared spaces and facilities of the dormitory — the kitchen, outdoor bathing area, television room and front porch are shared living areas for all dormitory residents.

Communal life in the Nakai forestry dormitory is created not through family connections but by their inverse: the absence of and

separation from family. This is an interesting complement to High's study of the *puta* cult in southern Laos (Chapter 5), which emphasises the importance of multi-sited kin networks. While she considers communal sentiments from the perspective of a village of origin, I explore a different sense of belonging at a place away from family and home. In contrast to the family-based households that comprise the majority of the population of the Nakai district centre, only one young forestry official lived with his wife and baby as a family in the forestry dormitory. The women officials at the dormitory are unmarried. The majority of men, especially those in their late twenties or older, are married but their families are elsewhere, usually in nearby districts or in the provincial capital of Thakek. Families very rarely come to visit Nakai though weekends see many married and unmarried officials return to their homes to visit family. As the wife of the DAFO head said, "people like to look for money here but they build their houses in other places".

The dormitory community does not replace family, just as Nakai usually does not replace home, but it does allow the nurturing of social relationships that sustain individuals during prolonged absences from family and home. These relationships within the dormitory are distinct from others in the district centre. This is clearly marked by the total exclusion of casual intimate relationships within the dormitory, even though male residents take the opportunity of being distant from their families to have girlfriends in Nakai. Marriage may result from acquaintance formed through DAFO yet, even in the midst of shared drunken celebrations, casual relationships never developed between dormitory residents. The familiarity entailed by communal living is balanced by a shared responsibility of all officials to DAFO and this responsibility structures relations between dormitory residents.

The communal living arrangements in the Nakai forestry dormitory demonstrate the strength of the Lao state — it has the power to prescribe personal relationships and dictate how officials live their private lives (Korolev, 2004; Smith and Pun, 2006). Nevertheless, there are clear distinctions between the formalised DAFO workspace and the more personalised space of the dormitory. Women officials always wear a *sinh* (Lao sarong for women) and men a collared shirt when they go to the office on weekdays, whereas their return to the dormitory is usually followed by a change into jeans, trousers and T-shirts. At the office people sit on a motley array of chairs, couches and stools, while at the dormitory more informal arrangements predominate, such as

sitting on mats on the ground, squatting, or lying on hammocks strung up on trees. A key social distinction between the office and the dormitory is formed by the frequent absence of high-ranking residents from the dormitory. The dormitory space is not needed or utilised much by the minority of high-ranking officials but is central in the lives of low-ranking residents, who do not have the financial means to socialise elsewhere. Internal cohesion is fostered in this more personal and informal space by the time residents spend living together and by sharing everyday concerns within the dormitory. Even forestry and agriculture officials who work at the same office and spend many work hours together carry out most daily activities — eating, cooking, bathing, washing clothes, watching television, gossiping — at their respective dormitories, rarely even visiting each other's dormitories. Similarly, forestry officials who live elsewhere in the district centre seldom visit the dormitory and never stay for meals. Quite simply, where low-ranking officials sleep is a strong determinant of where they spend much of their time.

The physical and social separation of the forestry dormitory from the office reflects and facilitates a similar separation of knowledge between the personal and public domains. In a study of Thai concepts of knowledge and power, Jackson (2004) portrays a "regime of images", whereby two distinct cultural logics coexist despite contradictions and inconsistencies. He refers to this as a "dichotomy between the public image that can be spoken about and the private reality that cannot be named" (Jackson, 2004: 212).[6] In this analysis, controls over discourse and actions vary systematically between the public and private spheres. Statements and practices in the public sphere are much more tightly controlled than equivalents in the private sphere. The regime of the public image "is neither static nor 'traditional', but rather is a contested and dynamic system of power/knowledge" (Jackson, 2004: 184). While Jackson's analysis is useful in understanding how different domains of knowledge/power intersect, the forestry dormitory in Nakai in no way represents a totally separate domain from the office — the office, dormitory and dormitory residents are all part of the Lao state. Yet a partial physical and social separation means that the dormitory does provide a more personalised space where low-ranking officials can express themselves in ways that are not possible in the formal office space. Rather than dichotomise the public and private as absolutes, I suggest that particular times and spaces may be more transparent or open to questioning state rhetoric than others. This draws on Heyman's

(1999: 14) recognition of historically "transparent moments" when "it becomes possible to see the weaving together of illegality and legality within states and societies that is usually obscured by reification of the 'law'". The dormitory is not inherently transparent but it is characterised by more transparent moments than the office workspace.

Some recent research on dormitories has focused on the paradoxical image of the dormitory as both "a site of control and resistance" (Smith and Pun, 2006: 1456; see also Korolev, 2004). While aspects of employer coercion have long been recognised in labour studies, the connotations of employee defiance fostered by dormitory living have only recently gained notice. Smith and Pun (2006: 1460) highlight the formation of groups and networks within dormitories where workers "actively ... manipulate their dormitory space for their own use". The key similarity between the huge industrial dormitories in southern China studied by Smith and Pun (2006: 1466) and the forestry dormitory in Nakai is that time spent in dormitories leads to "more chances for discussions" between dormitory residents who are separated from their family and homes and hence share concerns with each other. Dormitory residents in Nakai do not see themselves in any way as resisting the Lao state but the more open conversations in the dormitory contain significant commentary on the state. Thus, complaints, criticism and frustration that are never expressed in the office may emerge in the dormitory behind closed bedroom doors or during the frequent absence of high-ranking residents. The dormitory is not the only personal space available to marginal officials but it is central — the dormitory is the place where social bonds are cemented and conversations are most open.

REVEALING MYTHS OF STATE GOVERNANCE

Weekday activities of low-ranking forestry officials in Nakai start when all go punctually to the office by eight in the morning. Most officials stay at the office chatting and reading any old newspaper that is available. Around mid-morning, women forestry officials collect money from dormitory residents, walk to the market, chat with friends there and return to the dormitory to prepare lunch. Lunch at the dormitory is followed by an afternoon nap and watching Thai television, if the set is working. Some officials return to the office in the afternoon. After more conversations, occasional visits from friends and eating snacks, women make another collection of money, return to the market and

prepare dinner, while most men play sport, bathe or wash clothes (women use the communal washing area once the evening meal is finished). Lower-ranking officials, including all women residents, stay at the dormitory in the evenings watching more Thai soap operas, while higher-ranking, older, wealthier men go out to drink, eat grilled dog and flirt with young women.

Forestry officials in Nakai initially described their work as "surveying forests, surveying trees and cutting trees", proudly calling it "difficult work" because they have to sleep in villages and sometimes even the forest, entailing considerable physical hardship. The longer I stayed in Nakai, the more difficult it was to ask about such work as it became apparent that these initial depictions of forestry work did not accord with the lives of most dormitory residents. The description of the daily routine at the Nakai forestry dormitory demonstrates that, in the operation of the Lao state, there is no clear link between responsibility and action. This relates to a key governance issue challenging the Lao state: the disjunction between the central government, as the proponent of national policies, and its representatives in the rural periphery, who are expected to turn policy into practice (Government of Laos, 2003; Stuart-Fox, 2004). Officials face a particular challenge because they are implicitly taken to embody state ideology yet are constrained by contradictions operating within the state itself.

Public representations of the Lao state assert a united commitment to national development. Yet the state's internal hierarchy and inadequate support for many of its own officials ensure that bureaucratic practice is focused on the pursuit of personal benefits through patronage networks. The dormitory is a site that highlights this disjunction because both state rhetoric and practice are strong. Policy and rules are public symbols of the state that are reproduced by dormitory residents; yet sharing lives within the dormitory permits a comparison of personal experiences, revealing internal disparities and opening up questions as to the validity of the state's public proclamations. The community of marginal officials provides mutual support for its members and also subtly critiques the conditions that lead to its formation. I consider the public assertions that officials work for the benefit of the poor and embody social equality. These assertions are made in national policies and in internal rules that describe the functioning of the state. These symbols of state governance are universally propounded in the formal workspace of DAFO and also dominate discussions at the dormitory. Within the dormitory, however, alternative interpretations

emerge in the more frequent transparent moments that mark the privacy of bedrooms and the absence of superiors. The existence of the dormitory community thus enables marginal officials to discuss and question state rhetoric.

Poverty Alleviation

> The overarching objective to be achieved is poverty eradication (Government of Laos, 2005: 4).

National policy in contemporary Laos is focused on poverty alleviation and the improvement of rural livelihoods (Stuart-Fox, 2004; Rigg, 2005; Vatthana, 2006). Government officials are expected to implement such national policies and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) has recently been made responsible for rural development (Government of Laos, 2003: 48). Furthermore, these national policies implicitly frame district officials who are most distant from the centre as being the link between state policy and implementation in rural areas where poverty is most prevalent (Sisovath, Sysongkham and Danielsson, 2001: 9; Government of Laos, 2003: 34–5). Hence, district forestry officials are allocated a central role in plans to achieve national poverty alleviation. While a need for capacity building is recognised, there is an implicit assumption that officials already have an interest in striving for national goals for the benefit of the rural poor (Government of Laos, 2005: 16). This representation of the modern development official in contemporary policy mirrors earlier revolutionary depictions of the "new socialist man". Evans (1995: 5) contends that "[t]he concept of the ascetic, selfless person working for a higher existence is the folk model of a good person in Laos" and this was "the dominant popular perception of the new socialist man". The pre-existing ideal of a selfless person working for the benefit of society persists (Walker, Chapter 6), merely adopting new forms in modern-day Laos where national development rather than socialism now dominates the agenda.

National plans assign officials a critical role in the development process. Despite this, there has been no consideration of how officials conceive their role within the operation of the state. We must recognise the divergence between idealised national 'development' (*kan phatthana*), encapsulating aims for poverty eradication and rural development, and the actual aspirations of many Lao people, officials and non-officials alike, for personalised 'prosperity' (*khwam chalern*). The daily lives of

officials in the Nakai forestry dormitory reveal that publicly promoted national goals are not the real concerns of these agents of the state. In contrast to the attention granted to personal well-being, officials frequently express frustration about their own lack of prosperity. One woman often bemoaned in private, "I do not have money ... I only have enough money to buy food." Four other dormitory residents talked about their lack of money, one saying "I do not have any money at all", another then joking, "I am an official, not a businessman!" A strong reliance on the dormitory signifies a lack of prosperity. Those who have the financial resources socialise elsewhere in Nakai and even build their own houses in other districts of Khammouane Province. When dormitory living becomes a necessity, it comes to denote material hardship. While national policies identify rural villagers as 'the poor', marginal officials see themselves as underprivileged and frame themselves as deserving recipients rather than agents of development.

Unlike concerns about personal prosperity, aspirations to facilitate local development or to assist rural villagers are completely absent in dormitory conversations. Nakai's lack of development is something that officials comment on, but they wish to distance themselves from, rather than attempt to remedy, this situation. Contributing to this divide is the fact that dormitory residents are united together in originating from areas that are more developed than Nakai. During a bamboo shoot-collecting excursion, for instance, a young official described his home village in the lowlands of Khammouane Province. He said that while his home did not have the forests and waterfalls of the spot where we were having our lunch,

> it has lots of paddy, it is the area with the most paddy in Khammouane. Rice grown there goes all over Khammouane. It is different from places like Nakai which do not grow as much of their own rice.

Another resident in the dormitory described not liking Nakai because "there is nowhere to go and visit for fun". Nearly all officials I queried unhesitatingly replied that they would prefer to live in towns or their home villages. Nakai is "not prosperous" (*bo chalern*) and thus represents the opposite of what officials desire. Even officials who have lived in Nakai for many years and only infrequently visit their place of origin still refer to the latter as their home (*ban khoy*, my village). The supportive aspects of the dormitory community are valued but dormitory living in rural areas is no substitute for family and home. For district

Figure 7.3 The main road leading to Nakai from the lowlands signifies a lack of prosperity and hints at the sacrifices officials make by living there.

officials, residence in Nakai is a requirement of employment by the Lao state, not an expression of personal preference.

Education, migration and subsequent identity as a government official are attributes that distinguish officials as 'above' Nakai.[7] The majority of people in the district centre are immigrants from lowland areas of Laos (NTPC, 2004: 15) and in the dormitory the dominance of outsiders is even more marked as not one of the officials living there was originally from Nakai, all having moved to the uplands solely because of their employment by DAFO. In contrast to the homes of officials, Nakai is seen as an undeveloped upland area, carrying all the undesirable social connotations of backwardness associated with the rural countryside (*ban nok*) and the undomesticated forest (*pa*; see Turton, 2000a). This was apparent when an official attributed the limited religious practice by dormitory residents in Nakai to the inadequacy of Buddhist monks at the temple in the district centre: "the monks here are cheeky, they drink alcohol ... our dormitory is opposite so we

see what happens". In comparison to Nakai, where religious practice "does not have meaning", in her home village in Savannakhet Province religion is practised properly, "people make an offering, the monks recite prayers and everyone listens together". Dormitory living in Nakai is preferable to staying in villages but it is still undesirable compared to officials' own homes.

Officials frequently ascribe the social inadequacies of Nakai to the villagers who comprise the majority of the district population (see also World Bank, 2003). As the state does not employ villagers from Nakai, officials (*phanakngan*) and villagers (*sao ban*) are implicitly conceived of as mutually exclusive identities. The construction of boundaries between officials and villagers is a symbolic process that ignores the connections between these two social groups. For instance, some officials had previously been rice-farming villagers but, once appointed to DAFO, they identified themselves only as officials. Perceptions of difference from villagers and similarity with other forestry officials are strengthened during fieldwork when officials occasionally stay overnight in villages and in the forest. For instance, when some officials visited a village near the district centre, a young woman originally from the provincial capital prompted a quick return to the dormitory, saying that she needed to go to the toilet. When a villager suggested going in the garden behind the house because there were no facilities available in the village, the young official promptly declined. Rather than being a statement on the absence of toilet facilities — a common situation throughout Laos — this is more an assertion of social distinctions. Nakai is seen as socially inadequate and officials wish to separate themselves from this deficiency.

Rural backwardness in Nakai, the backwardness of the place and its people, is thus implicitly framed as a failing of Nakai. An absence of development means that the characteristics of Nakai are interpreted as factors obstructing development. In a classic statement of a state-society dichotomy a forestry official complained that "our work is difficult, the people do not have knowledge". Responsibility for backwardness is thus firmly attributed to local conditions and never interpreted as a sign of the state's or officials' own failures. Furthermore, national poverty reduction or the needs of the rural poor are never topics of dormitory conversation and officials never described their work as concerning poverty alleviation. The assertion in policy that district forestry officials are working for the poor, and that their effectiveness is limited only by a lack of skills, is rendered problematic in conversations within the

dormitory community. The interests of dormitory residents are firmly centred on their own well-being and desires for personal prosperity. The dormitory community in Nakai supports officials while they are separated from family and home, but this communal living is still an outcome of the obligatory sacrifice that officials must make for the state by living in the backward rural countryside.

Social Equality

> The Government of the Lao PDR aims at achieving high economic growth within a context of equity (Government of Laos, 2003: 28).

Socialist-inspired rhetoric proclaims equality for all in Laos and, ironically, in doing so generates significant inconsistencies within the state (Evans, 1998). Tensions between the state's ideal of equality and lived experiences of internal hierarchy are revealed through the lives of officials residing in the Nakai forestry dormitory. Communal rules espoused within the dormitory emphasise equality, mutual interdependence and shared responsibilities as members of the dormitory and representatives of the Lao state. This was made most evident one evening when all dormitory residents were called to assemble on the front porch. Senior residents spoke for an hour about appropriate behaviour required in the lead-up to an important party meeting at the district centre. One high-ranking official emphasised four rules: limit the use of electricity as the bills were too high; respect the head of the dormitory and report any absences to him; do not get drunk, gamble or flirt with young women; and, finally, share responsibilities for cooking communal meals at the dormitory and boiling water for drinking. He then instructed those gathered around: "we are members, we live together, we must act together". Yet the continuation of card games, quiet conversation, short departures in pursuit of cigarettes and the hushed antics of two drunken men throughout the meeting suggest that these appeals to simplified symbols of communal solidarity cannot be interpreted as strict prescriptions that unequivocally dictate action.

In fact, the very people espousing these ideals of equality and responsibility in relation to the dormitory rules are themselves the worst violators. The minority of high-ranking officials who flout dormitory rules do not follow state-endorsed rules because they have the authority to act in self-interested ways. For instance, the official who listed the four rules above expounded at length about the importance of

preparing meals together because everyone belonged as a member of the dormitory. Yet he is the one whom lower-ranking officials most openly complain about because he never gives any money for food, let alone assistance with food preparation. Yet he still arrogantly expects meals to be prepared for him. During his long-winded oration, low-ranking men even made softly spoken joking asides, dropping their heads to smile at friends behind their hands. This action of marginal officials concedes shared knowledge that it is their superiors who are most often out drinking, gambling, chasing girls and contributing little to communal meals because they have the money and authority to do so. Higher-ranking officials thus extol the virtues of rules, which they constantly violate, to lower-ranking officials who do not have the means to do the same.

Internal differentiation within the dormitory community is obscured symbolically because residents are all referred to as "officials" (*phanakngan*) or "members" (*samasik*). These terms imply respect to the ideal of equality as well as solidarity (*samakhi*). Whenever the dormitory is discussed as a collective, it is represented as a space where all are united in being equal members belonging to the dormitory for forestry officials, just as all are united in being government officials. The unfailing use of the unifying terms "officials" or "members" when talking of the dormitory collective also effectively conceals gender differences in notions of equality as members of the state. The dormitory represents a conceptually unusual social context in Laos — a group of men residing with a small number of unmarried women, all living distant from their families. Yet women residents are never referred to as eligible young women and "going to see young women" (*pay lin phu saw*) is instead synonymous with leaving the dormitory at night.

Avoidance of flirtatious language provides an implicit directive that deems sexual relations between dormitory residents as inappropriate. Maintaining suitable interpersonal relations is crucial for the persistence of the dormitory as an overtly state-sanctioned entity. Attempts to de-emphasise gender differences in the dormitory are evident in the terms of relatedness used to explain social relations among its residents. Although the dormitory is never associated with family (*khopkhua*), residents frequently said they "are relatives together" (*pen phi nong kan*) in a very typical statement of communal solidarity. When a visitor enquired as to who I was, a dormitory resident replied, "she is a relative from a foreign country". Similarly, the "head of the dormitory" (*hua na ho phak*) is not the highest-ranking resident but

instead the oldest and the only dormitory resident referred to by the respectful term "uncle" (*lung*). Nang, a 36-year-old woman who has lived in the dormitory for six years, explained how many of the young officials in the dormitory called her "older sister" (*uay*) as a means to deny any problems of being, at times, a lone woman resident.[8]

Nang was dismissive of gender differences, for example, deprecating others who thought women were "weak" (*on*) and unable to do forestry work, saying, "we are officials, we must do our work". This reflected the assertion in national policy of aims to achieve gender equality (Government of Laos, 2003: 8). Yet there are undeniable and strongly upheld gender differences perpetually enacted in bathing, cooking, sport and sleeping arrangements. Men and women residents very rarely go into each other's rooms. Usually the bedroom doors are kept closed and visitors to the women's room always knock at the door if they are men, in contrast to women who simply enter. Locked bedroom doors at night appear less as a deterrent for thieves, given that the television and other goods remain in communal rooms which are left unlocked overnight, and more as a symbolic restraint on inappropriate intimacy developing within the dormitory. Each bedroom has an individual padlock on the outside and a sliding bolt on the inside, the former for use during the day when officials are at the office and the latter for the night. Gender differences frequently, though not uniformly, relate to social inequalities within the dormitory. This is most apparent in food preparation: women residents always contribute to cooking, high-ranking men never contribute, and low-ranking men sometimes contribute. Women officials made at least one attempt to share cooking responsibilities more equitably amongst all dormitory residents but ultimately this was not successful.[9] The communal space and living within the dormitory is thus internally demarcated by gender, even though assertions of equality as officials of the Lao state meant that such differences are often denied.

As gender differences are enacted in the dormitory space, so too is internal hierarchy gradually revealed, again placing in question the claim that all residents are equal members of the state. The depiction of everyone being officials gave way to my gradual realisation that there are in fact three types of officials. The term *phanakngan*, though commonly used to refer to all officials, more precisely means 'full government officials' who receive a salary (*ngen duan*) of about US$30 per month. Conflated with these full officials are *sanyacan* (promissory officials) and *asasamak* (volunteers). Promissory officials receive reduced

wages of about half the full salary with small increments added over time. The *asasamak* are volunteers in the true sense because they receive no government salary and rely on their families for financial support until promoted to the rank of *sanyacan* or *phanakngan*. This formal stratification is reflected in informal conversation with marginal officials, who identify themselves as children (*dek noi*) and refer to the few high-ranking residents as *phu nyai*, literally meaning 'big people'. When superiors are referred to by name, the respectful term 'older brother' (*ai*) is always used as a prefix. Terms used to refer to high-ranking officials in the dormitory point to the deference due to one's superiors even though, unlike the purported value placed on equality, such a norm is never explicitly stated. Promissory officials and volunteers are usually hidden by reference to all simply as *phanakngan*. The reality of hierarchy is never a topic for public discussion.

Admission of internal divisions between officials is hindered by the status conveyed in wider social interactions by identification as a *phanakngan*, a full government official (Halpern, 1964; Vatthana, 2006). Younger officials who privately confirmed their status as volunteers tend to be somewhat embarrassed. In the absence of any other listeners, one dormitory resident said with a self-conscious smile, "I am only a volunteer, I do not receive a salary." The implicit norm of equality thus allows low-ranking officials to conceal their continuing dependency on family and support from other dormitory residents in the notion that they too are equal members of the dormitory and officials receiving full benefits from the Lao state. State rhetoric thus provides the basis for simplifications that support the symbolic construction of the dormitory community. Yet the disparity between individuals within the dormitory is strikingly apparent for those residing there. For instance, volunteers and promissory officials who comprise around half of the residents do not own motorbikes, are much less likely than full officials to leave the dormitory over the weekend, and rarely eat at any of the restaurants or food stalls in the district centre and then only when paid for by someone else. In contrast, the highest-ranking resident drives a new gold-coloured Toyota Tiger four-wheel-drive and owns a concrete house in the provincial capital of Thakek. Such differences between dormitory residents are never publicly discussed, yet they cannot be hidden when officials share their lives together. Idealised representations of the collective bureaucracy conveying a sense of unity and equality are caught up in a lived reality of deeply individualised and hierarchical social distinctions.

PERSONAL AGENTS IN AN AMBIGUOUS STATE

Communal living in the dormitory encourages moments of transparency in which the ambiguities and contradictions that permeate the Lao state are made patently obvious. Yet, of course, the dormitory is more than a place that facilitates gossip and undermines the state's simplified symbolic constructions. For marginal officials and the state, the rural dormitory serves mutually beneficial purposes, allowing marginal officials to be a part of the state and allowing the state to expand its bureaucracy into the rural periphery. To understand these processes, it is necessary to delve further into the experiences of marginal officials in Nakai, to understand how they are tied to the state and how the state is dependent upon them. This analysis demonstrates that the dormitory community plays a crucial role in mediating the relations between marginal officials and the Lao state.

In the Lao bureaucracy, formal plans for national development that embody ideas of disinterested sacrifice for the common good overlie practice that respects a private norm of localised exchange and reciprocity (Stuart-Fox, 2004). The process of advancement within the bureaucracy as described by marginal officials in Nakai provides a clear instance of this system. When I first met Nang, she told me she was a forestry official (*phanakngan pa mai*) and said that state representatives are rewarded with promotions for their acquisition of experience and the length of time they dedicate themselves to the nation. Over half a year later she revealed privately that she was actually still only a promissory official. She explained, quite resentfully, that she had been a promissory official for six years because "I do not know any elites, I do not have connections". Later, in the privacy of the women's dormitory bedroom, Nang told me that to become a full official one must either have connections (*sen nyai*, literally 'big strings'), usually family relations, or pay superiors US$2,500 to US$5,000, an amount well beyond her reach without external assistance.[10] In contrast to Nang, the other two young women who came to the dormitory during 2004–05 were both full officials immediately upon their placement in Nakai, one having an uncle high in the Ministry in Vientiane and the other's deceased father having been high in the provincial government. When the former, Daeng, asked her uncle in the Ministry to assist Nang, he replied that it would create problems for him because people would ask what relationship there was between them. Nang later explained, "Between him and Daeng there is no problem. Daeng is his niece, they are relatives, but there is nothing between him and me." In a

moment of extreme bitterness, Nang exclaimed, "I want to cry! In Laos experience is not important. Laos is not fair." In the moments of transparency facilitated in the dormitory space, state-sanctioned, family-based patronage is revealed by those who have the least hope of benefiting from such a system.

Yet despite the inadequacies of the state, employment as an official continues to entice. Low-ranking officials complain quietly at the dormitory but criticism of individual superiors is notably absent and talk of resignation is very rare. When I asked Nang why, given her frustrations, she did not leave her work, she replied, "I have done the training already. I do not want to be a farmer. It is difficult work. You get old quickly." The persistent appeal of the Lao state is initially intriguing as government salaries, even for a full official, are so low that it is surprising that anyone is enticed into the bureaucracy. While residence at the dormitory is free for all officials and rice is also provided, a government salary meets only the basic necessities for living at the Nakai district centre.[11] The allure of the Lao state can be understood only when the role of externally funded project work is recognised. Project work here refers to any local activities of private companies, development organisations or projects that entail involvement of DAFO. Project work allows officials to earn daily allowances (*atakin*) in addition to the meagre salaries paid by the Lao state. When DAFO receives project work such as surveying forests prior to road construction or raising awareness about conservation in villages, the road developer or conservation project is required to provide per diems to any officials involved — full, promissory or volunteer officials alike. The amount of the per diem is dependent on the project and the specific organisations involved, but for DAFO officials it is often around US$6 per day. At this rate a week of project work provides the equivalent of one month's government salary for a full official. Thus, per diems provided by project work and controlled by the state add to an otherwise insignificant government wage the potential to gain real prosperity.

At the time of my fieldwork, project work for district forestry officials in Nakai was very limited, though interest in per diems was high given the long anticipated arrival of project work associated with a large hydropower project, Nam Theun 2 (NT2).[12] In the absence of project work, activities of low-ranking officials during work hours are very limited. While taking pride in being recognised as a government official, away from the office low-ranking officials complain of being bored waiting for work and frustrated by listening to their superiors'

perpetual promises of soon-to-come projects. Moreover, the limited work that does come is always allocated to their higher-ranking colleagues. The daily lives of marginal forestry officials in Nakai clearly demonstrate that externally funded project work like that associated with NT2 is almost the only work these officials actually perform. As one dormitory resident explained, many officials are at the dormitory during work hours because "there is a lot of work but there is no money". When there is no externally funded project, then the state has no money and low-ranking officials do very little aside from demonstrating that they belong to DAFO by dutifully leaving the dormitory to go to the office each weekday morning.

Experiences of marginal officials in the rural periphery hint at a fundamental difficulty for the Lao state: it does not have the capacity to provide services to the nation but instead controls access to external service providers and mediates their interactions with the intended recipients. In efforts to conceal this weakness, project work is never referred to as such by officials — it is described as the work of the government (UNPAN, 2005). Thus, when I asked the head of DAFO in Nakai about photos in the office from a largely ineffectual World Bank–funded project that had finished in 2003,[13] he simply described it as "the work of our office". Project work is locally appropriated by state representatives to insinuate that the state has the ability and interest in providing services to the nation when often it does not. The World Bank funded project in Nakai is obvious, even in the absence of any reference to it by DAFO staff, because much of the office furniture and some motorbikes display their project origins with project stickers and handwritten labels. Externally funded project work is central in shaping relations between the state and its representatives in the rural periphery, though its importance has to be elided as it reveals the weakness of the Lao state.

Because high-ranking district officials have the power to allocate project work, it is not surprising that grievances such as Nang's are carefully left vague and anonymous, conveying frustration but not criticising anyone who has the potential to distribute patronage. For instance, while resting at the dormitory after a festival where a cow, some pigs and plenty of beer had been provided for DAFO officials, Nang complained, "we only eat three days a year, the rest of the year we do not eat". Some months later, Nang found her restraint in not voicing such statements more publicly would potentially be rewarded as she had been nominated for a position in a government body

associated with NT2, with the possibility of earning up to US$100 per month in a long-term position. She explained that her DAFO bosses had nominated her for the position as an unnamed foreign organisation wanted more women to be involved. Nang said they told her they did not want jealousy (*itsa*) and thus she would be expected to contribute some of her salary to others: "I will receive a high salary, I must help the bosses the same as the bosses help me." All officials must pay a percentage of their salary or per diems to their supervisors or contacts who provide them with work. Thus within the Lao bureaucracy, private expectations of exchange and reciprocity associated with the culture of patronage underlie the rhetoric of working for national development.

The importance of internal hierarchy and localised exchange is not unique to post-revolutionary Laos. Halpern (1964: 36) writes of Lao elites in the 1960s:

> Historically, severe competition has not been required ... status being gained for the most part through inheritance rather than hard work. Even individuals who have risen in the hierarchy are said to have done so not through personal qualities of application and persistence but as a result of inherent merit .... Such merit is not obtained by competitive action but through generosity and good deed.

In the context of small, localised groups of government officials, perceptions of "good deed" are strongly based on notions of personalised exchange. Just as cooperation and the exchange of labour are seen as a key marker of Tai communities, a comparable process of exchange shapes relations between lower-ranking and higher-ranking officials through access to and redistribution of per diems and other benefits provided by membership of the bureaucracy. Exchange sees lower-ranking officials contribute labour while their superiors control access to state-sanctioned patronage.

The dormitory community plays an important role in mediating these relations between marginal officials and the state. The norm of patrimonial and localised exchange and reciprocity permeates the entire bureaucracy. Yet for the most marginal officials, the absence of the dormitory would limit their ability to join such exchange networks. The dormitory subsidises many living expenses such as accommodation, rice and electricity, thus enabling marginal officials to be a part of the bureaucracy. Furthermore, entry into state employment is

dependent on connections and money that initiate localised exchange relationships and extend patronage networks, without which marginal officials can offer only the limited value of their labour. Shared living in the dormitory provides a means for officials to prove their worthiness, form connections and create obligations with 'relatives' connected to the same community. Similarly, the Lao state depends on the presence of marginal officials in order to expand the bureaucracy in the rural periphery. Without marginal officials, the Lao state would be revealed as a fraction of its apparent extent and with limited authority in the rural periphery. The presence of officials represents the presence of the state.

Yet, in becoming part of the Lao state, marginal officials discover its weaknesses. Most significantly, the state cannot even support its own employees. The modest living conditions of the dormitory highlight the resource limitations of the state and clash with personal aspirations for household-based affluence. Dormitory living per se is not equivalent to hardship, the relative wealth of high-ranking officials who reside in the Nakai forestry dormitory attests to that. But dormitory living through absolute necessity — without the means to build a house, buy a motorbike or socialise elsewhere — does denote a lack of personal prosperity. The dormitory community for marginal officials represents a sacrifice of living away from family and home in the expectation of compensation. Ironically then, for marginal officials it is dependence on the state that becomes associated with a lack of prosperity and it is the dormitory community that reveals their publicly unacknowledged sense of poverty. Concealment of volunteers and promissory officials also allows the state to represent itself as more extensive than it actually is and to mask its dependence on continued family support for a significant proportion of its workforce. Family support for marginal officials, however, is motivated by the expectation that this investment will be repaid through project work and promotion to a position as a full government official. Ultimately the state is dependent on aid from externally funded projects to support the multitude of patronage networks that run throughout the bureaucracy. Not surprisingly, complaints from marginal officials are most frequent when project work is scarce, when the state is perceived to be weak and not fulfilling its reciprocal obligations. This is when marginal officials spend much of their time at the dormitory talking, gossiping and occasionally complaining. Officials are not dedicated to the abstract nation-state. Instead they act within local patronage networks because it is the local

elites and family connections that will in time compensate them for their sacrifices and perhaps enable their progression to a life beyond the dormitory.

COMMUNITIES WITHIN THE STATE

Communal living in the Nakai forestry dormitory is an outcome of being a government official in the rural periphery — marginal officials could not be part of the state without dormitories and the Lao state could not expand the bureaucracy without marginal officials. The community of marginal officials formed at the dormitory is a product and part of the Lao state. Hence, the concept of community should not entail an assumption of an inherent contrast with bureaucratic institutions. Indeed, notions of community may actually aid attempts to understand the internal workings of the state. Recognition that small groups of officials can form localised communities helps moderate expectations that nationwide policies will result in specified and standardised forms of implementation. In Nakai, the dormitory reveals ambiguities and contradictions that permeate the Lao state. I found shared living in the dormitory was the key to being able to access the diverse and often conflicting perspectives government officials have to offer on the state. The dormitory community is most important for the least empowered officials, for those who have no choice but to rely on the support of other residents. For officials, restriction to the dormitory signifies an absence of prosperity but, at the same time, it is the dormitory community that helps marginal officials cope with their frustrations in failing to achieve their personal aspirations. The dormitory community helps marginal officials manage their disappointment with the weaknesses of the state.

Even though dormitory living does not automatically lead to criticism of the Lao state, the dormitory space is typified by more moments that question state rhetoric than the office. These transparent moments reveal how the formal responsibilities of government officials are often underlain by aspirations for personal prosperity, where prosperity depends on inclusion in a localised and hierarchical patronage system. Marginal officials rely on the sense of community they can develop with other residents while they await the possibility of becoming full government officials. Restriction to the dormitory through circumstance rather than choice brings to light another significant paradox permeating the Lao state. The state is powerful and can demand personal sacrifices of officials, but it is also weak and cannot always provide its

agents with sufficient recompense. Discordance between knowledge and practice is acceptable to all officials, provided expectations of reciprocity are met. When externally funded project work is scarce, there is a perceived breakdown in reciprocal relations. This is when the dormitory community sees more transparent moments emerge to question the public image of the state.

State failure to deliver prosperity to its most marginal officials leads to complaints and criticism within the dormitory community, a sign that the sense of obligation that binds officials to the state has been weakened. Here Li's (1999: 316) use of "compromise" to describe the state's achievement of rule shows value over "the more familiar binaries [of] accommodation and resistance". The notion of compromise emphasises that interactions with the state are situational and conditional negotiations rather than predictable forgone conclusions. I would extend her argument to emphasise that compromise occurs not only between "state functionaries and citizens" but also within the state (Li, 1999: 316). A focus on daily life in the Nakai forestry dormitory reveals the importance of compromise in the operation of the Lao state. Shared living in dormitory community reveals how the state manages to foster adherence to an ambivalent institution among low-ranking officials who are most disadvantaged by the system, and also how the same marginal officials use the dormitory as a forum in which they can more openly discuss their own experiences within the Lao state.

Many discussions of modern administration in the Tai world have used the image of the traditional village community as a basis to construct a critical perspective on the modern bureaucratic state. As Walker (Chapter 1) points out, this critique has made some contribution to local empowerment but it is limited by its reliance on a simplified state-society dichotomy. It also ignores the extent to which many forms of village community are, in fact, created in a process of engagement with the state. In this chapter, I have proposed an alternative way of reflecting critically on the modern state. Rather than using an idealised external community to highlight the faults of the modern state, I have argued that communities within the state are the sites of transparent moments that reveal the tensions and contradictions at the periphery of state influence. Recognition of these modern bureaucratic communities challenges simplified state-society dichotomies and shows that a critical study of the state can benefit from attention to the perspectives of those who work within it.

8

The Mechanics of Belonging: Regional Networks and Italian Scooters from Post-Revolutionary Laos

Warren Mayes

As Laos embraces market economics, the increasing availability of Western commodities and cultural practices is tempered by official nationalist calls to maintain traditional Lao culture and select the good aspects of international culture while rejecting the bad. Hidden by this convenient dichotomy is an urban history of migration and regional interdependency. From its re-development as a colonial administrative town, to its American-funded transformation into a small cosmopolitan city in the 1950s, to the current revival of this cosmopolitanism, the Lao capital Vientiane has been constituted by commodities, people and practices that contradict the logic of national culture that the current regime is appealing to in order to secure its legitimacy. In this chapter I argue that urban social networks contradict this logic by manipulating commodities to create new sites of belonging. These sites are ignored by conventional discussions of community as traditional, local and rural or as the imagined product of the formation of modern, geographically or ethnically bounded nations.

One of these new sites of belonging is the re-emergence of informal interest-based associations in Vientiane resembling groups that existed in the pre-revolutionary period. Martin Barber argues that

a combination of politics and corruption among the American-funded urban elite of the early 1970s meant that mutual interest associations based on hobbies flourished to the detriment of more socially beneficial welfare and discussion groups. He suggests that the revolutionary Pathet Lao came to power in 1975 because their "grassroots" organisations were far more successful in galvanising social support than elite urban associations (Barber, 1979: 287). While the sociology of group formation is remarkably similar in contemporary Vientiane, the impact of such groups is different. As in pre-revolutionary Vientiane, associations choose overseas educated leaders and members with local social prestige in military or bureaucratic circles. And, as in the early 1970s, it is recognised that "no association could be formed without the support of ... civil servants and military men in Vientiane" (Barber, 1979: 285). Today, however, the social function of these groups has changed. It is precisely the reliance on connections that allows hobby groups in contemporary Vientiane to reach into broader communities of belonging than is possible in the rigid system of official government associations promoting the maintenance of national culture.

Marginal social groups use informal associations in the post-revolutionary era as tools for inclusion in a growing regional urban community. Focusing on the emergence of the Vientiane Scooter Club, this chapter investigates the symbolic meaning attached to the club's central commodity, the Italian scooter, the sociology of club membership and the broader cultural negotiations involved in club activities in order to make an initial statement about emerging regional networks and their influence in Vientiane. Rather than seeking to identify the idea of community as an abstract quality of sociality in Laos, I follow Amit's (2002a: 3) call to return to the exploration of "actualised social forms" such as the network analysed in this chapter. Informal associations are networking sites that draw upon but are not strictly defined by the constraints of broader imagined categories of nation or ethnicity. Such networks form part of a broader regional community.

Informal associations provide a post-revolutionary generation of urbanites with spaces of belonging that outmanoeuvre the official cultural nationalism and development imperatives of government organisations. The Vientiane Scooter Club, formed in the early 1990s by a core group of Vietnamese Lao urban traders and small business owners, is more than just a forum for enthusiasts of the vintage Piaggio Vespa motorscooter. The club provides this group, whose Vietnamese ancestors' migrations have left them on the margins of urban society,

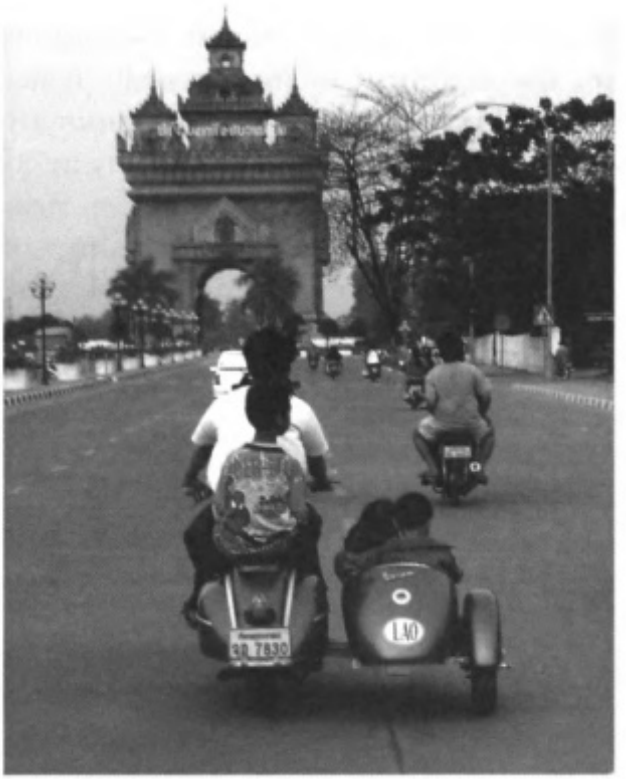

Figure 8.1 A Vespa and sidecar in Vientiane on Lane Xang Avenue, leading to Patuxai, the National Victory Monument.

with a vehicle to express belonging in new regional ways by opening spaces in which they can negotiate differences between their own personal histories and official cultural nationalism. In particular, the club's activities with Thai scooter groups provide them with a social role as hosts and gatekeepers for foreign visitors. Club members have also returned to Vietnam to confront and negotiate their own origins and, in the process, to form a new regional sense of belonging.

(RE)LOCATING THE SCOOTER

The Piaggio Vespa has achieved extraordinary global recognition since first being produced in 1940s postwar Italy by a redundant aircraft manufacturer. Clubs touting these restored vintage motor scooters have emerged all over the world. It has been argued that the durability of the scooter's image as a commodity is due to its continual transformation through processes of production and consumption articulated within specific historical and cultural settings (Hebdige, 2000). In the Italian language, Vespa means 'wasp'. It is a brand of motor scooter that has become synonymous with the word scooter itself. It became a

fashion icon in England during the 'mods and rockers' youth culture of the 1960s. There it was married with the image of "riotous assembly" at the coastal resorts of southern England where youth engaged in vandalism and gang violence, exemplified in the "Battle of Brighton" in 1964 (Hebdige, 2000: 153). The scooter's value is also shaped by the social relationships that emerge around its maintenance. In recent times the scooter has spread to most corners of the globe and clubs have emerged everywhere focusing on the restoration of 'classic' scooters. While the cultural and historical production of this image originates in Europe, its export to Asia has seen it embroiled in local histories that imbue it with different values.

Scooters first appeared in Laos in the 1950s and were a commodity admired by the small, moneyed urban Lao community, which emerged in a Vientiane propped up by American Cold War development aid after full independence had been gained from France in 1953. It is likely that Italian scooters arrived from Bangkok or Vietnam and became popular with the remaining French expatriate community and the incoming American personnel. An image from the late 1960s in Vientiane shows a motorbike store with large signs advertising "Vespa" (Halpern, 1969). Another image shows a fashionable urban Lao riding what appears to be an Italian scooter in the late 1950s (Halpern, 1959).

After 1975, during its period of socialist reform, Laos enjoyed links to the Soviet world but its urban centres became "re-ruralised" as failed economic collectivisation impoverished city dwellers who had to grow their own food and become self-sufficient (Evans, 1998: 26). Those most likely to ride scooters — wealthy urbanites and Western expatriates — either left Laos or were sent to re-education camps. At a time when urban youth in particular were being targeted in a "puritanical backlash ... dragged in for haircuts and women admonished not to wear any make-up", an Italian scooter was hardly the thing to be seen riding around town on (Evans, 2002: 179). Only since the early 1990s has the expression of wealth through the ownership and consumption of material property become acceptable, allowing associated forms of cultural expression to re-emerge. The estimated 30 Italian scooters now found in Laos are enjoying resurgent prestige because of their scarcity and their links to a pre-revolutionary European influence that is now returning as part of a broader reinvestment of cosmopolitan cultural capital in Laos.

The core of the symbolic value derived from the scooter comes from a combination of its global appeal and its history as a 'classic'

commodity. Its value increases with age. The desire to harness this value in Laos has given rise to a discourse of originality surrounding the scooters. Riders argue that unlike the Vespa scooters in Thailand, which they say were made in India, the Vespas in Laos were original European imports, probably made in France or Italy. This makes them more authentic than others in the region. The origins of engine parts and serial numbers were notoriously hard to identify but one rider asserted that records for his scooter existed at the Lao motor registry dating back before the revolution. This record proved the scooter's Lao history, even though some of the engine parts had been replaced with Vietnamese spares. Each Vespa engine has a serial number intended to verify its authenticity. When I checked the serial numbers from four of the Vespas in Laos at a website containing serial numbers for all factories in Europe and India, they did not appear anywhere. This was met with a remarkable lack of astonishment by the riders. They said that the scooters would have had their engines swapped and the numbers chiselled out and replaced with new ones for resale, probably when they were in Vietnam. Despite this, they still call their scooters *rot bohan*, meaning 'antique vehicles'. The scooters were localised by this combination of pre-revolutionary Lao origins and Indochinese cannibalisation of parts which obscured their European origin.

The scooter occupies a liminal, transnational status. It is not a Lao product as much of its value is based on the fact that it is from somewhere else. Nevertheless, the claim by club members that their scooters are qualitatively different from others in the region is not as problematic as it first seems. The contradiction in asserting Lao identity through a European product is central to the story of modern Laos. In a modernity characterised by multiple interpretations of the Lao past by outside influences (Goscha and Ivarsson, 2003), commodities with links to the pre-revolutionary past can be both Lao and European at the same time. The Lao state emerged from French colonial intervention in Indochina and was created where otherwise there would have been Siamese suzerainty (Osborne, 2000: 132). Reflecting this historical circumstance, scooters are vehicles sourced locally and restored using parts imported from Thailand and Vietnam but not produced in Laos due to a reticence among the riders to start an official business in the unstable local business environment. So the product remains not quite local yet not quite global, much like many of the club members themselves and the "land in-between" in which they live (Evans, 2002). The scooter has become valued in the post-revolutionary period for its

ability to present the rider as culturally Lao as well as regionally and globally connected. The riders have achieved this through the successful formation of a club founded upon regional networks that integrate scooters and their riders into a broader community.

THE VIENTIANE SCOOTER CLUB

Since the early 1990s, the pioneers of the scooter club have made money buying scooters, whose cultural value people had forgotten. They purchased rusting models sitting in gardens for US$50 to US$100, fixing them and occasionally selling them to foreigners for up to US$1,500. The scooters normally change hands locally for lower prices, depending upon the relationship between buyer and seller. Club members restrict purchases because they say they want to "keep the Vespas as part of the club", which consists of a core of around 15 people with a similar number on the fringe. Prospective club members need to know a club member, particularly a mechanic, either as a relative or close friend. Rather than being a formal requirement of membership, it is simply a matter of practicality. Instead of being subject to formal rules, membership is regulated by the small number of scooters and the even smaller number of people who know how to repair them.

The club has an inter-generational character with members aged between 19 and 45 years old. Senior members, including a policeman and Lao returned from the diaspora, focus on the restoration of 'classic' scooters. Young members, university students, business people and junior government officials are drawn to the expression of modernity and sophistication that the scooter provides. Younger members of the club include university students and junior workers in their twenties with disposable income and access to the foreign media in which the scooter is portrayed as a fashion symbol. They also own the latest mobile phones, clothing fashions and other consumer goods, purchased mainly from Thailand, which they consider to be markers of urban connectedness and social prestige. What older members consider as valuable commodities because of the cosmopolitan history they revive, younger members see as an expression of global connectedness bereft of historical consciousness.

The Vientiane Scooter Club is male-dominated. Females become members primarily as wives and girlfriends and, during rallies, sit on the back of the scooter behind the men. Perhaps because it has been restored by male mechanics, the scooter is a masculine symbol. The

statement of individuality produced by the rarity of the bike, along with its peculiar shape and sound, is used by male riders to flirt with girls. When the group drive around, they are not afraid to surround and chat up young women, something they would not do unless they were in a group. When accompanied by wives and girlfriends on rallies, however, the riders are monitored and disciplined by the club women who ensure they behave themselves. Hebdige (2000: 131) notes the initial threat the feminine image of the Vespa posed for the masculine riding culture in the United Kingdom. Its adoption in Laos as an element of masculine riding culture is evidence of the attribution of local meanings to imported global products and reflects the dynamics of group formation in the post-revolutionary period.

Until recently, the club was careful to call itself a group (*kum*), not a club or association (*samakhom*), because it is hard to get formal approval to form an independent association. All organisations in Laos must be affiliated with or be endorsed by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and most do so by publicly displaying support for government policy, assisting development and promoting Lao culture. This kind of regulatory power is maintained less through party directives and more through networks of patronage. Club members are aware that without such patronage they would find it impossible to conduct activities with Thai groups. The official leader and face of the club is Ai Panh,[1] an Interior Ministry police officer with a penchant for collecting classic vehicles and who provides vital support for the riders' activities. He is central to the organisation of transnational Lao-Thai rallies, gaining permission from customs officials for the Thai riders to bring their scooters into Laos. He also gives the club's existence legitimacy in the eyes of other government and party officials.

The cosmopolitan image associated with the scooter has drawn interest from a Lao-French family with links to pre-revolutionary urban Vientiane. Now a successful local businessman, Ai Tuan was educated in France after leaving Laos when he was a teenager. Ai Tuan returned to Vientiane five years ago with his wife and children and says he had to learn to do things "the Lao way" before he could succeed. Using money borrowed from business connections in France and Australia, Ai Tuan courted old school friends, now high-ranking government officials, in order to establish his business activities. He drives a French Peugeot sedan and owns three Vespas, a clear indication of his desire to maintain a particularly European international status. Ai Tuan manages to secure sponsorship for the club's rallies and other activities from

local businesses which provide fuel, T-shirts and stickers to place on the scooters. This official sponsorship in turn boosts the legitimacy of the club.

While patrons like Ai Panh and Ai Tuan may advance their own interests by offering support to the club, they do not own the activities or relations that constitute the club. Far from being simple subordinates, club members gain their own prestige and benefits from the relationship. In fact, it is not the patrons but the mechanics who maintain ultimate control of the club. The rediscovery of the scooter, its refurbishment and clandestine production from parts over the last ten years began with a Vietnamese-Chinese-Lao man, Ai Souk, who went to Bangkok to study goldsmithing and learned how to repair scooters from friends he made there. His father had owned a Vespa before the regime changed in 1975. The mechanic plays a vital role in maintaining the club, as the scooters frequently break down and his expertise is of more practical importance to other riders than patronage. Because of the associated prestige, he has attracted other club members to work with him as part-time apprentices and some have also been to Bangkok to learn how to repair the scooters.

To be a mechanic is to display a superior knowledge of the scooter and consequently an intimate connection to a commodity that is seen as a conduit to enhanced regional belonging. The physicality of the mechanic's activities — getting dirty with engine oil and rusty engine parts — is symbolic of this intimacy. One of the apprentice mechanics has even begun welding miniature replica scooters out of the scrap metal used to restore the real scooters in such extraordinary detail that engine parts are included in the replicas. The mechanics strive to master the scooter — and thus attain an identity they associate with an urban regional community — precisely because they are also striving to negotiate aspects of their own past that make belonging to Laos problematic.

HIDDEN VIETNAMESE ORIGINS

The ambiguous boundaries of the regional community within which the club is located are reflected in the backgrounds of the majority of club members, who are urban Vietnamese Lao. They are from small-goods trading families that have been in Laos for up to four generations and have Lao citizenship. In my interviews with them, it was only when the birthplace and occupation of their ancestors was questioned

in detail that it became apparent that in a few cases they were still ethnically Vietnamese on both sides of the family. Most were born in Vientiane, while most of their parents were born in the southern Lao towns of Thakek, Savannakhet and Pakse, all having large Vietnamese communities. It was only when the birthplace of their grandparents and great-grandparents was explored that they would say they migrated from Vietnam. Most could speak at least some Vietnamese but always conversed in Lao in the group and on other social occasions that I attended with them. Most riders had also been 'Laoised' to such an extent that they felt ambivalent about their Vietnamese origins.

Anthropological investigations in Southeast Asia hold that notions of ethnicity are pliable and vulnerable to social and political change rather than being essential and primordial. Instead of being strongly ethnicised, the pre-colonial polity was organised around a social hierarchy in which all kinds of groups, including ethnic ones, played a role such that cultural differences "did not denote significant major structural frontiers in the social system" (Leach, 1970: 67; see also Izikowitz, 1969: 145; Turton, 2000a: 201; Trankell, 1999). Ethnicity has since been constructed by the modern state, which legitimates itself by promoting a unified culture as essential, primordial and stretching back into time immemorial (Anderson, 1991). Keyes shows how the logic of ethnic classification pursued by the modern state is flawed and ignores the frontiers in which "motley crowds" have continually mixed and merged (Keyes, 2002a: 1173). Yet even people who explore these frontiers are influenced by the logic of ethnicity. The ethnic affiliation of the scooter riders oscillated between Lao and Vietnamese, although they were well aware that they had fallen victim to what Evans (2000a: 284) describes as an assumed congruence between nation-state and culture.

Unlike the official "Vietnamese community in Laos" (Vietnam News Agency, 2005a), which is made up principally of revolutionary and post-revolutionary Vietnamese migrants who enjoy a degree of official recognition and diplomatic support, the (Vietnamese) Lao of the scooter club describe their families as *sao ophanyop* (refugees). They explain their Lao identity as a result of discrimination but seem unaware of its historical foundations:

> My family does not talk about being Vietnamese. People who know us, know we are, because we celebrate the New Year because my father wants to respect his ancestors. But if we want to get official documents or entry into school, we do not mention that we have Vietnamese ancestors because we might be ignored.

Old Lao elite families with links to the diaspora, who are now reinvesting in economy and society under the country's 'open door' policy, were stripped of their wealth and power by the revolution. Vietnamese Lao who have taken over the urban goods trade may be frowned upon by cultural nationalists because of the discrepancy between their economic success and their cultural position. As one scooter club member said:

> Lao people tend to look down on Vietnamese people, in an indirect way. It's not really obvious, but you can tell. There are many Vietnamese people in Laos, even Kaysone Phomvihane [former president] was half-Viet, but I guess now they don't want Vietnamese people to be leaders.

On a diplomatic level and within party ranks, the Vietnamese connection is strong and the influence of overseas Vietnamese is officially recognised (Stuart-Fox, 1980; Vietnam News Agency, 2005b). On a cultural level, it is possible that this contributes to discrimination, particularly against poorer urban Vietnamese without official connections. The contradiction between the government's appeals to authentic Lao culture and the Vietnamese influence on its political organisation may fuel cultural distaste for the broader Vietnamese influence in Lao society.

The riders' great-grandparents migrated to colonial towns in southern or central Laos to work in a pre–World War Two French administration concerned less with promoting Lao nationalism and more with their own broader Indochinese agenda. For most of the colonial period there were more Vietnamese employed in the administration than Lao and, as late as the 1940s, Vientiane's population was only 23,200, of which over half (12,400) were Vietnamese working for the French (Tanabe and Keyes, 2002: 12; Barber, 1979: 103). After the French left, most Vietnamese returned to Vietnam but those who stayed bore the brunt of anti-Vietnamese sentiment from the newly nationalist Lao elite. After 1975, the pro-Vietnamese regime brought Vietnamese migrants along with it but the official 'special friendship' between Laos and Vietnam has failed to destroy the association between Vietnamese and latent forms of urban colonialism dating from the French era.

Some club members originally said they had relatives whose ancestors were Chinese, perhaps because they felt this to be more legitimate as the Chinese have integrated culturally as well as economically into Lao society. This integration has occurred despite a post-revolutionary period in which Lao-Chinese relations suffered politically (Stuart-Fox, 1980; Rossetti, 1997). Ai Souk, the mechanic, explained that while

he observed the Vietnamese New Year to remember his ancestors, he had a Chinese great-grandfather and his own grandfather was a driver for the former Lao king in Luangphrabang, still the ultimate symbol of Lao culture for many Lao. The mechanic was thus seeking a culturally flexible representation of his ancestry, as both regional yet authentically Lao.

The Vietnamese have experienced a greater degree of economic marginality than affluent Chinese business families who have entered into marriage alliances with important Lao families both before and after the revolution (Halpern, 1961a: 9; Rossetti, 1997: 28). These different fates are historically connected. Halpern concluded that resentment of the Vietnamese, as former colonial administrators and as a continuing potential colonising threat, eased relations between Lao and Chinese in the pre-revolutionary era (Halpern, 1961a: 8). Dislike of Vietnamese had little to do with a dislike of communism and was associated more with historical examples of colonialism than with political ideologies. It is often noted that Prince Souphanouvong, who led the Lao communist movement, was criticised by other members of the pre-revolutionary Lao elite, not for being a communist per se but for marrying a Vietnamese national (Halpern, 1961b: 30).

The current regime is now moving away from the (Vietnamese-inspired) revolutionary ideals that justified its seizure of power in 1975 and is moving toward the elaboration of cultural practices considered traditional and essentially Lao to legitimate its rule. Groups such as the Vietnamese, who have dominated the tiny urban Lao social spaces since the colonial era, may be marginalised by this incipient emphasis on traditional culture. Through new opportunities for cultural practice provided by the opening of the economy and the formation of informal associations, they can enact a supra-ethnic regional identity, distinct from both their Vietnamese origins and the official emphasis on traditional Lao culture.

For young Vietnamese Lao, the feeling of being not quite Lao yet being unable to make sense of their origins in Vietnam increases their desire to appear globally connected. The scooter fulfils this desire. The young riders were constantly expressing their individuality and independence. In contrast, many young elite Lao studying in university or working in government saw it as important, in public at least, to appear to be adhering to Lao etiquette and protecting tradition, regardless of their own private social practices. One scooter rider came to see me at a government office with long hair, tattoos and a nose ring. I was

questioned afterwards by some astonished young officials at the office who told me that he could not have been Lao because he did not look polite and must be on drugs. He was not identified as Vietnamese but as someone who refused to practise Lao culture. The young government officials saying this were the 'good' or 'obedient' kids or *dek di* (as one was even nicknamed) and they differed from the younger elements of the scooter club, who perhaps reflected a broader lack of concern among youth for adhering to the notions of correct speech, actions and appearance. While identifying themselves as Lao, the club members were in a liminal social location which placed them on the margins of the parochial emphasis on traditional culture.

In addition to the club's core Vietnamese Lao members, the personal histories of other club members link them to the region and the world. Other members include Chinese Lao urban residents with links to pre-revolutionary Vientiane and Lao returned from France, Australia and Germany. As the popularity of the scooter has grown and more have become available, members of the expatriate community have joined the club. These have included a Japanese expatriate working for the Japanese Embassy, a Dutch expatriate businessman, a development worker from Luxembourg and myself, an Australian research student. Expatriates working in development and business provide the club with a new sense of global connectedness and a forum for intercultural dialogue. The allure of the West so fundamental to modern Thai identity, which Pattana (2005: 37) argues has resulted from centuries of intercultural dialogue, is also present in the transnational character of the scooter club. The scooter and its core activity, the rally, give riders the ability to display these cosmopolitan connections. For the riders, the scooter rally is not just a chance to explore a strange frontier and to discover more about the remote Lao countryside. It is also a chance to demonstrate that they have a respected place in Vientiane society and are able to overcome national borders and explore the region.

THE SCOOTER RALLY

In early February 2006, a noisy convoy of 53 vintage[2] Piaggio Vespa scooters set off from Vientiane on a 500-kilometre trip through the northern jungles to Luangphrabang on the second Lao-Thai Scooter Rally. Some 40 Thai riders joined the expedition, most having driven their lavishly restored scooters from Bangkok in order to attend the

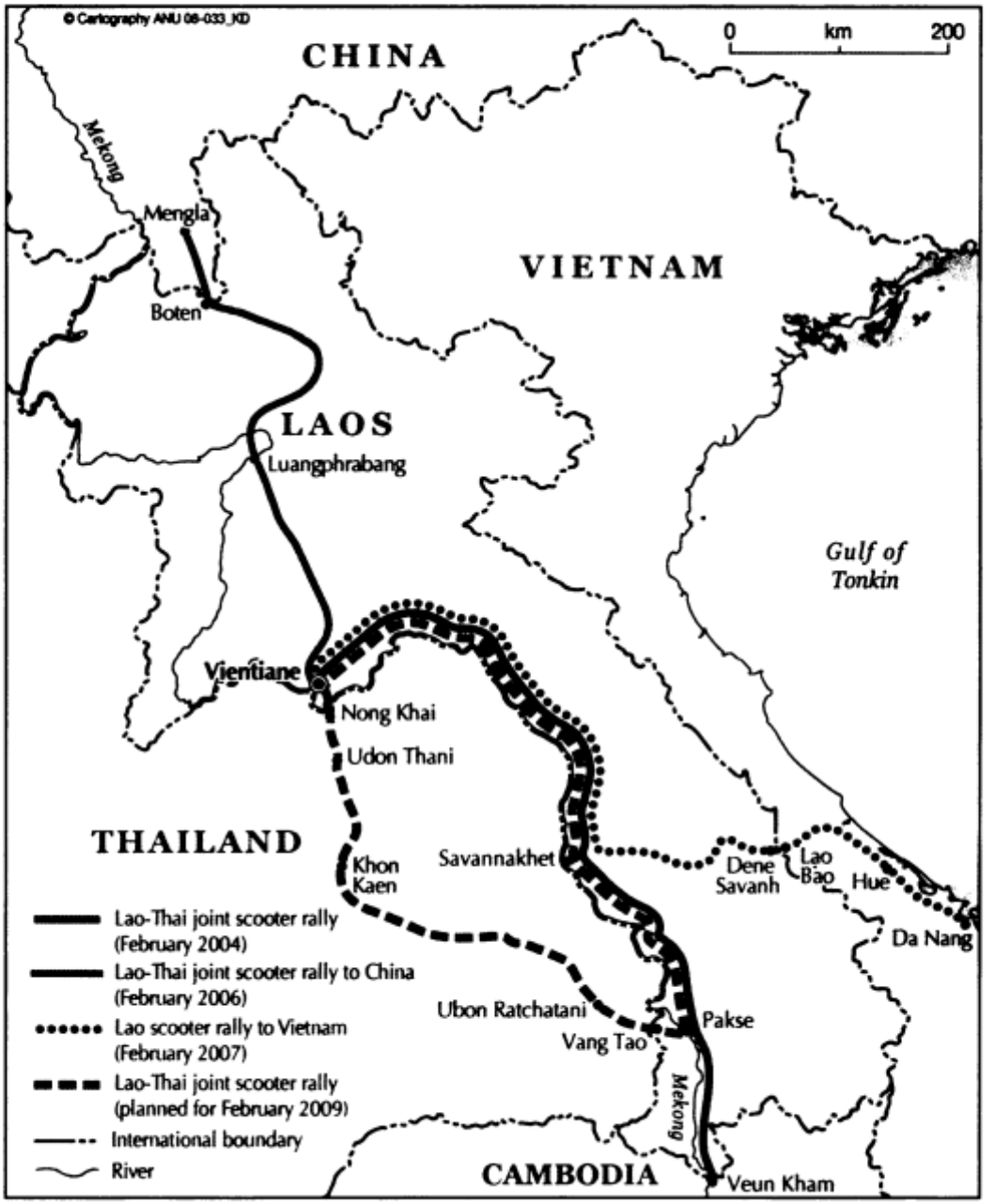

Figure 8.2 Laos and its neighbours, showing the scooter rally routes.

rally. After travelling with the Thai group to Luangphrabang, 13 riders from Laos embarked on a further journey, overcoming fatigue and cold weather to cross the Chinese border two days later. They proudly displayed their rally banner to bemused shoppers in the centre of the southern Chinese town of Mengla. They returned to Vientiane exhausted after riding over 1,200 kilometres.

The core activity of the club is to rally through the countryside, where the scooter serves as a symbol of urban social status and the country is designated as a place to tour. Despite the recent increase in foreign leisure tourism, most domestic travel is undertaken for utilitarian purposes. A growing number of industrial labourers and students now travel home to their provinces to visit relatives during festival periods, but it is mainly the more wealthy urban Lao who make leisure trips to scenic spots in the countryside. The club's long expeditions on vintage scooters have an associated set of non-touristic meanings for its members. The group justifies its activities with philanthropy. Riders donate books and study equipment to remote primary schools in Lao provinces, distribute road-safety pamphlets to other drivers along the rally route, and offer smallgoods to local villagers.

The emphasis on exploration transforms the riders socially, taking them out of their normal social environments in the manner of a rite of passage where they experience heightened feelings of belonging or "communitas" (Turner, 1969: 132). Once on a scooter rally, they are no longer the traders or family members with hidden Vietnamese heritage that they are in Vientiane. They become travellers whose shared aim is to navigate and overcome the geographical boundaries of the nation-state, while ensuring that their old scooters do not break down, thereby intensifying their bonds with one another. They sleep in cheap local guesthouses or stay with relatives. They eat market food and patronise restaurants only for special celebrations. Thus while the club presents its rallies as tourist-oriented events, they are more akin to expeditions where scarce resources and extreme conditions place a different value on participation. There are constant engine problems, dangerous stretches of road and logistical challenges to overcome on days when riding, fixing scooters and planning the journey ahead can last for 12 hours or more. At each significant milestone on the trip, senior members of the club pose graciously for the camera in a reserved, solemn portrait fashion, reminiscent of early European explorers who travelled up the Mekong River in search of a route to China (Osborne, 2000). Group photographs were very important. In 2006, with some 50 riders present and dozens of them with their own digital cameras, visits to important sites could take hours as each rider sought to take a group photo. While earlier surveyors mapped out the geography of their travels, scooter rallies map out the social location of club members within a wider imagined belonging to the region. They come to terms with their urban Vietnamese Lao origins by

Figure 8.3 Members of the Vientiane Scooter Club reach the Chinese border near Boten. The banner reads: "Safety first. Wear helmets. Vientiane – Luangphrabang".

associating with the people at the borders of the Lao world: the Thai and the Vietnamese.

A LAO-THAI DIALOGUE

Frederick Barth (1969: 11) argued that notions of collective belonging often mistakenly assume that boundary maintenance is unproblematic and follows from isolation. I agree with Barth's argument that communal belonging is, in fact, defined at its boundaries — at points of contact with other groups — and not by innate cultural substance. However, for social connections to be actualised, these boundary negotiations require more than the construction of symbolic referents of difference, or the shared experience of the institutional transformation of time and space that has arrived with the modern state (A. Cohen, 1985; Anderson, 1991). For the collective feeling of belonging to be realised by participants, it has to be symbolically and institutionally constructed in actual social relationships.

Figure 8.4 One of the visiting Lambretta riders from Thailand.

If the Vientiane Scooter Club is constituted internally by cosmopolitan relationships of patronage and of hidden Vietnamese origins, then it is constituted as Lao at its borders in relation to the Thai Motor Scooter Rider Group. A motley crew of young and old Vespa and Lambretta fanatics from urban Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen and other Thai cities, they dress and act more like Harley Davidson bikers than scooter riders. Black leather jackets, dark sunglasses and 1970s hairstyles are evidence that many of the older riders, now in their forties and fifties, have hung on to their rebellious youth identities through the scooter. Two riders even profess their schoolyard friendship with famous Thai folk-rock singer and activist Ad Karabao. While the scooter has been revived in Laos by Vientiane's small club of less than 30 riders, the scooter in Thailand has produced a subculture with thousands of riders in Bangkok alone forming their own clubs and activities. While the Lao seek to enjoy similar cosmopolitan values, the Lao-Thai scooter rally was informed by an ambiguity over the use of the hyphen and a resulting struggle to decide whether the prefix would be Lao or Thai.

From the beginning, the rally was an exercise in micro-relations informed by a Lao-Thai nationalist problematic. On the evening before the Thai riders were due to arrive in Vientiane, the scooter club held a planning meeting chaired by their policeman chief, Ai Panh. The meeting was an attempt to fashion the riders as a Lao group. At the meeting, Ai Panh spent a long time stressing the importance of maintaining order once the Thai riders arrived. The scooter club leaders not only wanted to make sure the Thai riders behaved themselves but also to ensure that the younger Lao riders did not get involved in any misbehaviour. "Make sure they follow our rules and our culture", said Ai Panh to the riders. When the Thai group came, the younger riders would take the opportunity to give them orders, one driving alongside the convoy of Thai scooters and telling them abruptly to turn their headlights on because that was the regulation in Laos, even though local drivers were speeding past in the other direction, without their lights on. On many occasions the Lao riders would become reserved and look on in silence at the loud behaviour of the Thai riders, perhaps due to the expectations placed on the Lao group as hosts to Thai rally participants.

The emphasis on control exposed an underlying social subtext to the transnational camaraderie of the scooter rally. The hierarchical *ai nong* (older sibling, younger sibling) relationship is often associated with the Thai-Lao relationship, particularly from the perspective of an older Thai "colonising view" perceiving Laos and the Lao as a non-country or, at best, a tributary in a Thai world (Ivarsson, 2003: 259). From the Lao nationalist view, it is considered insulting and tied to a history of Thai domination. Thus Lao academics write that while the Thai refer to the relationship using the proverb *ban phi muang nong* (fraternal countries, but translating literally as 'elder sibling's country, younger sibling's country'), the Lao avoid its patronising connotations and use the more neutral *ban kai huan khiang* (neighbouring countries, translating literally as 'close villages, adjacent homes') (Mayoury and Pheuiphanh, 1994: 1). This tension was reflected in the different styles of the two club leaders but it was overcome by their friendship.

The leaders of the two groups had been close friends since Lao mechanics first went to Bangkok for training. They shared a concern for the younger riders for whom they were responsible. Phi Motlek is the tall commanding leader of the Motor Scooter Rider Group, a conglomeration of clubs from all over Thailand. Phi Motlek is a natural gas firm employee with a wife and son and owns a diesel Mitsubishi

4WD and a small guesthouse in the centre of Bangkok. He is largely responsible for organising the Thai scooter rallies to Laos. He displays a different style of leadership to Ai Panh. Phi Motlek is charismatic, commanding and intentionally tries to stand out in a crowd and be identified as the organiser. Ai Panh is quiet, authoritarian, someone who is known and respected as the authority by his subordinates but who would otherwise not go to great lengths to show it, leaving that instead to the club's business patron. For his part, Phi Motlek was always among the Thai group with a megaphone blaring out polite instructions, thus satisfying his Lao counterparts' desire to control what they saw as the potential for waywardness and delinquency of the Thai riders. Phi Motlek told me that he did not think he would organise such a big group to come to Laos again next year. "It is too hard to control them, everybody wants to go off in different directions", he said.

Cultural difference was ill-defined at the level of practice and, in the Lao case, required enforcement. On one occasion when a young Lao rider borrowed Phi Motlek's megaphone to invite the riders to a restaurant to eat dinner and started speaking in Thai, he was met with shouts of "speak Lao" from Ai Panh. Young Lao look to a Bangkok-centred media culture for its modernity, technology and symbols of global connectedness. When asked which public figure they would most like to emulate, the majority of these young Vietnamese Lao answered "Thaksin Shinawatra", the billionaire media tycoon and prime minister of Thailand (until ousted by a coup in September 2006). The Bangkok riders, many of whom were also pro-Thaksin in their politics, embody these symbols and also give the Lao an opportunity to display their own competence at being modern. The Lao were keen to show the Thai riders that they could be just as modern — driving the same scooters, wearing the same clothes and working in broadly similar jobs. Along with the experience of sharing a journey lasting eight days, these displays brought both groups closer together.

Of the 43 Thai riders who attended the rally, there was a core of 15 riders who had come to Laos for a previous rally in February 2004. During that journey, they said, they were reluctant about coming to Laos because they knew very little about it and expected it to be something of a wild frontier, impoverished and traditional. These were blue-collar workers, mainly from Bangkok, whose professions included vehicle mechanic, restaurant worker, mobile phone salesman and factory floor worker. When they came to Laos, however, they discovered strong friendships with the members of the Lao scooter club. On their second

trip in 2006, this group now called themselves the "Special 15". Riders in the larger group represented scooter clubs in Bangkok, Nong Khai, Udon Thani, Chiang Mai and Khon Kaen. However, the Lao group found the size of the Thai group prohibitive. "We had no time to get to know most of them", said one Lao rider. So the Special 15, who were mainly from Bangkok, remained key partners in this Lao-Thai dialogue. They had a new philanthropic enthusiasm about coming to Laos and their interactions with poor village children and bewildered Lao villagers were marked by fun, jokes and friendship, though the ai nong subtext could still emerge. At a school in Vientiane Province where the group were donating equipment, they listened to the school children sing the national anthem of Laos in a loud, united chorus. After this, the Thai group embarked on a rendition of the Thai national anthem which, to the silent consternation of the local education officials present, the children could sing almost as well as they could the Lao anthem.

A subtle process of representation and display of symbols such as club insignia, T-shirts, identity cards and banners reproduced the symbolic importance of the group. These symbols connected the riders, giving them a united sense of purpose and belonging and helping to overcome divisions between Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, but they also exposed competition between subgroups. In Luangphrabang in 2006, a huge rally poster that had been created for the event and then signed by each member of the rally was auctioned off to the highest bidder. The bidding contest turned into a status challenge and after many bids from other clubs, the Thai Scooter Guru club and Vientiane Scooter Club remained in the bidding. Backed by some of its foreign members, the Vientiane Scooter Club was still unable to outbid a wealthy member of the Scooter Gurus, who purchased the banner for over US$250.

Despite being constantly challenged by the regulations of the state and the assumed congruence between cultural difference and national identity, the bonds created between the Lao and Thai riders on their joint rallies remained strong. It was the communitas of the rallies that drew the riders together in the first place and allowed them to overcome the challenges of cultural difference in order to find a new regional sense of belonging.

THE RETURN TO VIETNAM

In February 2007, the Vientiane Scooter Club travelled across national borders for the second time on a rally to the Vietnamese port city of

Da Nang. The seven-day return journey took the riders a combined distance of over 2,000 kilometres from Vientiane to Da Nang via the imperial city of Hue. The journey was made by 15 riders. Most were Lao-Vietnamese, some of whom had never been to Vietnam or seen the sea. While the Lao leg of the journey entailed a philanthropic expedition, whose aim was to donate equipment to remote schools and to spread a message of road safety, the Vietnamese leg was shrouded in mystery and held out the promise of great adventure and discovery.

The riders imagined the rally as an expedition rather than a tour in the sense of a pre-planned and pre-designated journey along the well-trodden paths that characterise contemporary mainstream tourism. The rally involved great uncertainty. Like the earlier European explorations, sickness was a factor. Injury, stomach problems, fatigue and flu were all encountered during the rugged journey. The riders were not sure that the route taken was safe for scooters, nor that the old scooters could actually complete the journey. The negotiations with border officials and locals added to this uncertainty. In China in 2006, the riders were forced to leave their scooters at the border checkpoint and take a minibus after being refused entry, so it was with bated breath that they completed the Vietnamese customs documents to secure entry for their bikes and great elation when they were finally allowed in.

The Vietnam journey also exposed regulatory regimes that differentiated the Lao from the Thai. A Thai scooter group, which had originally planned to go along with the Lao, was required by Vietnamese customs to purchase an expensive package tour with a guide. Each Thai rider had to spend US$500 for what became an expensive sightseeing trip. In contrast, the Lao riders were beneficiaries of the special friendship between Laos and Vietnam and could enter Vietnam without a guide, relying instead on their own experience and language skills. The Thai group found themselves within the regulatory regime of mainstream tourism, offering them conveniently placed facilities. Its philosophy of vacation offered them respite from working life. For many of the Lao riders who worked as full-time mechanics, the scooter rally was a constant struggle and treated seriously as the culmination of months of work.

The rally was also an expedition to explore and discover new sources of Vespa parts and old models to sustain the Vientiane club. The riders succeeded in finding a wealthy collector in Da Nang. In his house, hidden down a crowded lane on the outskirts of the city, the collector had dusty rooms full of rusty old 1960s and 1970s scooter

models waiting to be sold and refurbished. The riders were excited to discover rare 1950s model Vespas refurbished by the collector. They spent hours talking with him over tea and made plans to have spare parts sent from Vietnam back to Vientiane. Trade networks for the Vespa exist everywhere and are informal, depending on personal links between clubs and collectors that connect the region. The Da Nang connection will keep the Vientiane club thriving with parts and potentially entire models in the future.

In a brief meeting in Hue, the riders met the local Vespa club and found themselves staring in the mirror. The Hue riders had old Vespa models just like the Vientiane club. They also had a mixture of old and young members, although the majority of the riders were younger and seemed to be more interested in cultivating modern punk clothing styles than the Lao riders. Speaking in Vietnamese, the riders became instant friends and in their brief 20-minute gathering exchanged presents, including varieties of local beer and club insignia. The Hue club promised to organise a visit to Laos and the Vientiane riders promised to welcome and guide them with their Vietnamese language and cultural skills.

The Vientiane club's rally to Vietnam was a return to the land from which their families had originated. While they had the language skills and some of the cultural knowledge to assist this return, their exploration of Vietnam made them as aware of the differences between them and the Vietnamese, and the similarities they shared. Many experiences during the rally encouraged the riders to differentiate themselves from the Vietnamese they met along the way. A scuffle at the border checkpoint between a gang of Vietnamese youths and border police was the first event the riders encountered on entry to Vietnam. "They are real fast kids here, more daring than the Lao kids", said one rider. The gang of Vietnamese youths then waited outside the checkpoint and blocked the road, forcing the club riders to go around them on the way into Vietnam, an aggressive confrontation rarely experienced in Laos.

Comments made by the riders about the Vietnamese served to differentiate their 'character' from that of the Lao. The riders found shopkeepers in the busy shopping centres loud and rude. "Why do they have this annoyed character all the time, it is like they want to fight you", one of the club riders commented. Another suggested that this annoyed character may have been due to the lack of space and large number of people in Vietnam. The riders were constructing an opposition between the conflict-based conception of self-preservation

and improvement in Vietnam and its antithesis, the humble Lao self that avoids overt conflict. Yet they also shared an admiration for Vietnamese thrift. "They do everything fast" and "they enforce the rules", which they felt that Lao authorities could not seem to do. Most conversations emphasised difference with the common claim that "our country does not have this". Laos was not only redefined as a lack of things that Vietnam had but was also redefined as "our country" for these Vietnamese Lao, and in the process, Vietnam was defined as "foreign".

The foreignness of Vietnam was part of its enticement for some of the younger riders who were bored with life in Laos, wanting freedom and modern styles and continually being aware of not quite fitting into traditional Lao culture. Vietnam offered a new place in which they could rediscover a modern belonging. Khon, one young Lao-Vietnamese rider and junior official in Vientiane, had actively cultivated Vietnamese styles in Laos since spending six months studying in Vietnam. He wore the latest Vietnamese fashions, listened to Vietnamese pop music and dated Vietnamese women in Laos. With his Vietnamese language skills, he was keen to show the other riders around Da Nang and even met up with an old girlfriend there. He sees his own links to Vietnam as making him a legitimate conduit of Vietnamese modernity. He feels he must strive to become a representative of Vietnamese civilisation in Laos.

Khon was among a minority of the Lao riders who achieved a *viet kieu*[3] (Vietnamese living outside Vietnam) status in the eyes of other club members when they returned to Vietnam using their language skills and making friends, although only one had relatives in Da Nang. When in the group, however, these viet kieu remained Lao. They communicated in Lao about the things going on around them, despite some situations when all of those in the conversation could speak Vietnamese. They became more regional, realising they were not quite Lao and, upon returning to Vietnam, not quite Vietnamese.

THE CRASH OF CIVILISATIONS

The fragility of the shared cultural ideals experienced during such cross-border adventures became apparent after one of the riders crashed his bike in Vietnam. On the return journey, 20 kilometres from the Lao border, Toun, the lead rider, ran into a drunken villager on the road just after dark. The force of the collision knocked Toun and his

girlfriend onto the road, injuring his girlfriend's leg and smashing the side of his face into the concrete. The villager got a concussion and a large cut on his face. In the ensuing chaos, the couple lay on the road stunned while dozens of villagers ran out to investigate. The drunken villager was immediately rushed to the hospital.

In the confusing minutes after the crash, time slowed down and both riders and villagers were wrenched out of their familiar routines. Relationships between club members and between riders and villagers were marked by miscommunication. Other riders distanced themselves from the crash victims. It is considered bad luck to come near accident victims in case you are blamed or held responsible for their death or injury. One of the senior wives of the riders treated Toun and his girlfriend like strangers. She stared at them from a distance and asked if they were all right. They don't help because they *yan tot* (fear blame), explained Toun. Avoidance of responsibility was a form of self-preservation. Once it became clear that the riders were going to survive and once the negotiations had been completed, this fear of blame receded. If the scooter rally is the cultural practice that binds club members together and enables the crossing of cultural borders, then the crash signifies the fragility and potential destruction of such communal experiences. It literally demobilises the group and reinforces ideas of difference and the primacy of static boundaries between Vietnamese and (Vietnamese) Lao people.

The group leaders entered the usual monetary negotiations associated with vehicle accidents. The scooter could not be moved from its position on its side in the middle of the dark road until the police arrived. The responsible party was automatically considered to be the more wealthy visitor. The negotiated price came down considerably when an X-ray of the villager's head did not reveal any damage and the villager's inebriation was taken into account. The village originally wanted ten million Vietnamese dong (US$620) as compensation for the accident. As a Westerner I was kept away from the negotiations for fear that expectations of my wealth would encourage the villagers to increase their demands. The group finally paid over three million dong (US$200) to cover medical and administrative costs.

New relationships were formed in the village in the hours after the crash that partially repaired the miscommunication between riders and villagers and gave the riders some influence in the monetary negotiations. Sitting drinking whiskey with the local police, the policeman club leader, Ai Panh, was at home in the countryside. He handed

out his Interior Ministry Investigations Department card and got one of the Vietnamese-speaking riders to translate. The local policemen inspected his card with interest and then quickly handed it back to him as if it was beyond their station to keep. In the eyes of the local police, this tourist and foreigner suddenly became a party official, government representative and distant colleague.

While some members formed new relationships with the villagers, for others the accident only served to characterise these people as untrustworthy locals who were either filled with trickery or led simple lives and could not understand the riders. In Laos and Vietnam, the rural locals around the club were often treated with caution during rallies and were either seen as beneficiaries of their patronage or as dangers to avoid. In this case the villagers appeared to fit many of the stereotypes the riders had come to associate with the Vietnamese 'character'. The high cost of the event, the alcohol and the quiet of the evening roads inspired a discussion among the riders waiting in a group about how the accident had been manipulated by the villagers. "They must have seen Toun's lights and heard his scooter. The road was empty. Maybe they were waiting for someone to come so they could get money", said one rider. He suspected that the villagers had caused the accident in an attempt to benefit financially.

In a conversation after the event, Ten, wife of one of the Lao-Vietnamese riders, said she thought that some Vietnamese people were tricksters. They had opened a minimart on her street in Vientiane which competed with her own minimart and they had told customers that her shop was bad. At dinner the evening after the accident in Vietnam, one of the older rider's wives, Bee, prevented a conversation around the table about the character of Vietnamese people. With a serious stare she said that it would *pit kan muang* (be politically incorrect) and "we should remember the relationship between Laos and Vietnam". There were a few smiles but no replies to this comment. The discourse and fear of pit kan muang is a common concern for urban Lao.

THE FLEXIBILITY OF REGIONAL NETWORKS

In February 2006, the Vientiane scooter club held a dinner to celebrate the success of the rally to China. Ai Tuan, patron and club sponsor, made a key speech. He said that each member of the club was nothing on their own. "Ai Panh is just a normal policeman. I am just a normal businessman. We are all just normal people. But it is the club that

makes us special", he said. This was an expression of the importance of the group and its transformative potential for members in the face of a broader confusion about their place in society. "Many people don't think that driving to China is important but we know that we have done something important. We are people who find it hard to make a difference otherwise." The role that foreigners played in the club was also mentioned. They were praised for their commitment to the club. The *falang* (Westerners) made the club feel more important because their presence quite literally made the connections that the club enjoyed more cosmopolitan by linking the scooter as a commodity with the embodiment of the region it came from. The scooter club is a node in an emerging set of regional relationships that are distinct in that they combine, merge and oscillate between a broader imagined belonging to Laos as a nation, to Vietnamese as an ethnicity, and to Thailand as a site of modernity. They are networks of practice that indicate the potential for an understanding of community as regional, however impermanent.

Rather than being a form of leisure tourism or a private hobby, scooter rallies, like religious pilgrimages or labour and educational migration, are experienced as a form of regional exploration and belonging for the riders. They are also inevitably shaped by regional inequalities and the sustainability of the networks is dependent upon the ability of leading club members to negotiate these inequalities. The Lao policeman is able to gain the permission for the Thai riders to come to Laos, but permission has not yet been forthcoming on the Thai side for a reciprocal visit. The unregistered and unmodified Lao scooters are still deemed unsuitable for Thai highways.[4] On the other hand, the Thai riders were allowed into Vietnam only on an expensive group tour with a guide, while the Lao group was able to enter Vietnam freely, due in part to the special relationship between these Lao-Vietnamese riders and Vietnam. The riders actively seek to explore and overcome boundaries through the transnational character of their rallies. The rally to Vietnam in 2007 saw the riders cross national boundaries on their scooters for the first time.[5] Their ability to enter Vietnam was a logical extension of both their family origins and the origins of the scooters. The Vietnam expedition allowed some of the riders to combine their Lao club identities with their more introspective Vietnamese origins and to find a new space in which to negotiate their experiences with the Thai rider group. However, their ability to overturn regional inequalities also made them more aware than ever of

their own liminality. They discovered they were not quite Vietnamese in Vietnam, only to return to being not quite Lao in Laos. The strength of the social bonds that sustain the club are, in fact, founded upon this experience of liminality.

It is the relationships constructed around the scooter and the sense of belonging it engenders that give the scooter its social meaning. Hebdige (2000: 125) argues that "in order to 'read off' the meanings associated with any consumer commodity we need to pay close attention to the specificities of the place and period in which that commodity is consumed". However, the scooter riders are more than just consumers. The scooter in Laos was originally an imported product that is now producing consumers (as club members) who are beginning to re-define the original product and in the process, themselves as regional explorers. They are doing this through their geographical journeys as a club and their negotiations and dialogue with the Thai and Vietnamese Other. Through the practices and values associated with their scooters, the riders are becoming participants in a broader regional community.

9

Re-Configuring Belonging in Post-Socialist Xishuangbanna, China

Antonella Diana

On the day of the first wedding ceremony, Xiao Hong arrived at his bride's parents' house accompanied by the best man, his friends and close family members. As Tai[1] tradition prescribes, he offered the bride two *mukhwan*[2] as symbol of their union. Surrounded by the bridesmaid, her best friends and her sister, Yi Kaeo[3] welcomed the groom. She was dressed in a modern version of a Tai wedding dress, a pink short-sleeved blouse (*pha seua*) and a long wrap-around skirt (*pha sin*).

The marriage ritual took place in the innermost corner of the living room of the bride's house. The couple was joined in marriage through a spirit-binding ceremony (*sukhwan*) performed by a Tai religious practitioner, assisted by three elders. The officiant pronounced the blessing in Pali language, after inviting the spirits to consume the food and alcohol offered to them. The offering included black and white steamed glutinous rice, a boiled hen and rooster, a bunch of bananas, some sweets and corn alcohol. Yi Kaeo and Xiao Hong's spiritual essences (*khwan*) were symbolically joined by the tying of numerous white threads around their wrists by their parents and other elders.

Two weeks later, the new couple held a second wedding ceremony for Xiao Hong's Han[4] friends and relatives. This time, the celebration took place at his parents' house in one of the township's state farm settlements. In the morning, Xiao Hong collected the bride from her

Figure 9.1 Xiao Hong and Yi Kaeo on their way to the second wedding ceremony.

house. For this ceremony, Yi Kaeo chose a different wedding dress — a vermilion material, a distinctive feature of Han brides, had been cut into a Tai-style blouse and skirt by the skilled hands of the village tailor. When Xiao Hong arrived to collect her, he presented his bride with a bouquet of red roses. The couple then got into a sumptuous black car decorated with red and pink bows. The crackling of firecrackers to ward off evil spirits marked the beginning of the procession of friends and relatives to the groom's house.

In accordance with Confucian filial piety, on arrival at his house the couple honoured Xiao Hong's parents with a formal greeting. Soon after they shifted from the Han ritual domain to a modified version of a Tai wedding ceremony. Two old Tai men from Yi Kaeo's village re-performed an abbreviated spirit-binding rite in the corner of the living room next to the television. No chicken was offered to the spirits, only some sweets, sticky rice and Chinese rice wine. Xiao Hong and Yi Kaeo had their wrists tied by their parents and a few Tai elders. In the background, on the wall, stood a photo of the couple dressed in Tang dynasty clothes. The photo, which was framed as an old-style Chinese scroll, had been taken in a professional photo studio in Jinghong city, following the fashion that has recently arrived in the countryside from the metropolitan areas of China.

These two ceremonies were held in Mengman, a small town on the south-western tip of Xishuangbanna, China, near the border with Laos.[5] In the weddings, symbols drawn from the Han Chinese and Tai cultural worlds are intertwined, sometimes being virtually indistinguishable from each other. Taking the cultural complexity of the weddings as a starting point, this chapter seeks to disentangle the dynamics of belonging in this border region of contemporary China, as articulated in the context of ethnic, national and transnational communities.

On her identity card, the ethnicity of Yi Kaeo, the bride, is recorded as *daizu* (Dai), one of the 56 officially recognised nationalities within the Chinese nation. Yet her parents and grandparents refer to themselves by alternating this official label with the term Tai Lue, an ethnic self-designation adopted by many Tai speakers spanning the borders of five modern nation-states: China, Burma, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam.[6] Until 1950, the Tai Lue were the politically and demographically dominant people of a semi-independent polity, Sipsongpanna, ruled by a Tai chief. Before the demarcation of modern state borders, Sipsongpanna covered the southernmost portion of today's Yunnan Province and parts of north-western Laos. Being part of a horizontal web of interconnected political hubs, Sipsongpanna maintained close political and social relations with other Tai principalities in what is now northern Laos, the Shan states of Burma and northern Thailand (P. Cohen, 2000a; Keyes, 1992, 1995; Davis, 2003). These ties were maintained through marriage alliances between ruling families, trade, and forced and spontaneous migration. Because of its liminal position between the mighty Asian empires, Sipsongpanna was a crossroad where Chinese, Burmese and Tai Southeast Asian cultural practices converged to constitute a multicultural amalgam, a "motley throng" (Giersch, 2006).

At the end of the nineteenth century, the demarcation of boundaries between colonial powers and China resulted in the incorporation of the south-eastern territories of Sipsongpanna into French Indochina and the inclusion of most of the Lue kingdom into the Qing Empire. Following the Communist takeover in China in 1949, Sipsongpanna was integrated into the People's Republic of China and was transformed into the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture. The Tai Lue were officially classified as Dai. The political and social unrest that characterised the Land Reform (1956), the Great Leap Forward (1958) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) caused thousands of Tai Lue

to flee from famine and persecution and seek asylum in neighbouring countries. Many Tai Lue in north-western Laos were also forced to migrate into Thailand by the occupation of Muang Sing by the Pathet Lao in 1962. Yet, despite these migrations, strict border surveillance prevented a more fluid interaction among the Tai Lue scattered between modern nation-states. This started to change after the mid-1980s when the post-Mao 'reform and open door' policies of the Chinese state, coupled with new projects of regional economic cooperation, restored trade and travel across borders.

In the countries where they live today, the Tai Lue are officially categorised in different ways according to each government's ethnic policy, each classification responding to the need for legitimacy of the nation-state. While in China the Lue are regarded as a sub-branch of the Dai nationality, in Laos they are included in the 'lowland Lao' (*lao lum*) category. In China and Laos, state rhetoric emphasises the separation of the Tai Lue within the state boundaries from other Lue groups across the border. In Thailand, however, the Tai Lue living within national borders are often regarded as one of the Tai subgroups forming the larger T(h)ai nation (Farrelly, Chapter 4).

Partly in response to nationalist classificatory projects and assimilationist policies, some Western anthropologists have joined Thai scholars in creating a counter-discourse that stresses the cultural similarities of the Lue groups living across the borders. The Lue have come to be regarded as a paradigmatic people having a strong sense of common identity based on shared cultural traits: language, valley-dwelling settlement pattern, wet rice agriculture, a combination of Theravada Buddhism and spirit beliefs, and common historical roots (Moerman, 1965, 1968; Keyes, 1992; P. Cohen, 2000b; Hsieh, 1995, 1989). More recently, resumed social interactions between the Tai Lue across borders have been translated by some scholars as the re-emerging of a transnational ethnic community (Davis, 2003; P. Cohen, 2000a; Keyes, 1992; Wasan, 2005). "[The] case of the Lue", Keyes (1992: 7) writes, "will lead ... to a consideration of how transnational linkages which are increasingly relevant ... may stimulate imaginings of communities which are not the same as those with roots in national discourse". These scholars propose that the increase in cross-border movement and exchange since the 1990s has enabled the Lue to develop creative ways to bypass state nationalist practices and discourses and to revitalise an imagined pan-Tai community united by a sentiment of "shared ethnic oppression" (Davis, 2003: 178).

Re-connectedness, Davis argues, follows along the Buddhist path and emerges as a combination of ancient ties and global flows to resist hegemonic nationalism. Similarly, Wasan (2005) traces elements of a transnational "ethnoscape" (Appadurai, 1996) in the return of exiled Tai Lue to China and the cross-border journeys of Buddhist monks between Thailand, Burma and China. He also envisions a pan-ethnic "soundscape" (Wasan, 2005: 211) in the production and circulation of Tai music across national borders. His conclusion is that such forms of transnational connectivity allow the Tai Lue to "re-emplace" themselves within their ancient homeland of Sipsongpanna, from where they had been displaced by Chinese national rule.

This body of scholarship raises two key issues. First, what these scholars share is a focus on community as a "structure of feeling" (Williams, 1973: 46; Appadurai, 1996: 199) rather than with community as "actualised social form" based on face-to-face social relations (Amit, 2002a: 3). The fact that some people living across modern national borders originate from the same region, speak the same language, have occasional social contact across borders and sporadically attend the same rituals seems to be a sufficient condition for constituting a community (Hage, 2005: 468). Moreover, through an emphasis on 'imagining' over the 'social', these accounts provide us with limited evidence of the lived social practices, enduring social relations and rooted connectedness between the members of this transnational community (Castoriadis, 1987; Appadurai, 1996). Davis (2003: 195) hints at an idea of a transnational public sphere created by the diffusion of videos, floppy disks of Tai script and CDs across borders. She remarks that these cultural objects "are circulating through face-to-face contact and exchange" between Tai monks and that "[t]ransnational ethnic communities ... are in many ways social movements, and these are organised as movements always have been: by people" (Davis, 2003: 178). However, we are not provided with any sense of the social intensity of such face-to-face interactions or of the socially embedded nature of such exchanges. The primary demographic focus of these accounts of Tai Lue transnational community is a group of peripatetic monks and a small elite of political and cultural activists gravitating around the main Buddhist monastery in Jinghong — the capital of Xishuangbanna — and nearby temples. More importantly, by presupposing a categorical unity between their subjects and other Tai Lue people, the scholars of transnational connection turn particular findings into universalising conclusions. What is underestimated is that many

Tai Lue may not enjoy as much free movement across borders as monks and expatriate businessmen.

Secondly, there is a common assumption that members of the Tai Lue transnational community express their collective identities when they stand at its boundaries by distinguishing themselves from the entities of the nation-states with which they come to interact. In this case, the boundary that delimits the Tai cultural and social world corresponds to the premodern spatial geography of the Tai principalities. Across this ethnic boundary, the Tai are assumed to interact with the national dominant cultures marked by modern national borders. In the Chinese context, the "collective cultural consciousness" (Amit, 2002a: 6) of the Tai Lue becomes significant at the boundary with the Han cultural domain, which is identified with the Chinese nation. The conclusion is that the nation-state, with its hegemonic cultural and political practices, is antagonistic to marginalised and oppressed ethnic groups living at its periphery. As a corollary, the social and cultural practices of transnational communities stand in opposition to and resist the bounding power of the nation-state (Davis, 2003: 196–7). Yet perhaps this privileging of the transnational over the national ignores the quotidian engagement with the nation that marks Tai Lue people's lives in China.

This chapter seeks to shed new light on ways of belonging to the Chinese national community and the Tai Lue transnational community.[7] It seeks to bring the 'social' and the 'imagining' together. In so doing, I endorse Amit's tenet that "[c]ommunity arises out of an interaction between the imagination of solidarity and its realization through social relations" (Amit, 2002a: 18). Belonging is uttered through a process of cultural and social identification with the national community that does not exclude a transnational resonance in nationally oriented cultural practices.

The analysis focuses on the first generation of 'reform and open door' Dai youth with high school education living at the geographical periphery of China along the border with Laos. It is a group aged between 18 and 25, born in the 1980s, at the beginning of the transition from the Maoist socialist era to the Dengist post-socialist period. Far from claiming a universal truth for the Dai as a whole, I intend to provide an alternative perspective on how a particular group of Dai articulate their belonging in the new political and economic arrangements of modern China. The focus will not be the commonly assumed abstract cultural frictions but rather the grounded cultural intimacies

between the nation and its ethnic subjects (Herzfeld, 1997). I explore these cultural intimacies by dwelling upon symbolism, commensality, family, friendship, mobility and self-improvement. I suggest that the post-socialist cultural, economic, and educational agenda of the Chinese state have strengthened among young Dai a sentimental and social realisation of inclusion into the Chinese national community. At the same time, I argue that the conceptual dichotomies ethnicity/nation and national/transnational are solved in practice by Dai youth identification with the Chinese state's category daizu. In the two wedding ceremonies that opened this chapter, we witnessed this practical resolution.

CULTIVATING THE SELF, DEVELOPING THE NATION

On the wall of the Mengman township primary school, the writing in red characters admonishes the children:

> The guiding principles of education: Persist with education that serves the construction of socialist modernisation and serves the people. Blend education with work and social reality. Cultivate the complete moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic development of the next generation of socialist citizens.

This official motto exhorts young Chinese citizens to contribute to the development of a modern socialist nation by coupling social practice with personal improvement. The link between personal development and nation-building has been a recurrent topic in the Chinese state's rhetoric of the 'reform and open door' era since the 1980s, but since the early 2000s it has become a pervasive topos in both official and private discourses (Nyíri, 2006: 88). This is inscribed within the Chinese Communist Party's new agenda of building a "socialist spiritual and material civilization" and improving the "quality" (*suzhi*) of the population, and agenda whose ultimate goal is the modernisation of China's society and therefore the nation as a whole (Nyíri, 2006: 86–8). While its meaning is impossible to define clearly in Chinese — it is generally inadequately translated as 'quality' in English — the term *suzhi* has nevertheless become one of those world-making words in contemporary China. It is a floating signifier that refers to the "qualities of civility, self-discipline, and modernity" of an individual and of the population as a whole (Yan, 2003: 494). Suzhi is utilised to rationalise "social and political hierarchies of all sorts, with those of 'high' quality gaining more income, power and status than the 'low'" (Kipnis, 2006: 295).

Figure 9.2 Mengman primary school's exhortations to its young Chinese citizens.

As a general rule, rural areas and people from a rural background are classified in the hierarchy as having 'low quality', while urban places and people from urban background are defined as having 'high quality'. In between the two ends are intermediate degrees of low and high quality that might vary according to one person's economic, educational or political achievements.

The concept of suzhi, which is pervasive in both rural and urban contexts, has played a crucial role in mobilising national loyalty. A Han migrant to Laos told me about his strong desire to go back and live in his homeland of China, where his fellow countrymen's level of suzhi was higher than that of Lao people. Suzhi has also been the social and moral path chosen by many members of the first young Dai generation of the reform era in Mengman. This occurred not only through the youths' imagining but also in practice in their daily lives. Cultivating suzhi for oneself has in fact become the process whereby the abstract feelings for the nation have been materialised into grounded social forms and embodied by the nation's members. The commitment of Mengman Dai

youth to the national maxim derives from the education they received in the state's schools, the cradle where the inborn characteristics of an individual are meant to be nurtured to a full development (Kipnis, 2006: 297). Youth education has long been recognised as a catalyst for nationalism and nation-building. In China's 'reform and open door' era, the role of education has become even more significant with the policy of "education for quality", aimed at improving the "quality" of the nation's people through all-round moral, intellectual and physical training (Kipnis, 2006: 298).

According to my survey, in Mengman town a large number of young Dai aged between 18 and 25 have completed primary school education; at least half of them, mainly girls, have obtained a junior secondary school degree at the township school; and a third of them, mostly girls, have received high school education.[8] Among these educated youngsters are Yi Kaeo (the bride introduced earlier) and Yi Kham Tip. Both girls have completed high school at the Normal School in Jinghong and both seem to have developed those personal qualities by which they distinguish themselves from their parents and a farming background. In Anagnost's (2004: 190) terms, for young educated Dai, improving suzhi has become a strategy of social positioning towards a middle-class status through a rhetoric and practice of separation from those of low suzhi.

Yi Kaeo and Yi Kham Tip's mastering *putonghua* (standard Chinese, Mandarin) through higher education is one of the markers of their improved suzhi. This distinction from their parents is manifest in the girls' mocking of their parents' low level of Chinese. In their daily conversations with friends and family, the national idiom is alternated with Tai Lue language and the local variant of Yunnan dialect. Even in situations where the Tai Lue language prevails, it is often interspersed with phrases or terms in Chinese to convey modern meanings that the Tai Lue language is not able to express for these young people. The girls would use the Chinese words to refer to telephone, television and mobile phones. Also when articulating concepts of time such as 'week' and 'minute', the Chinese terms *xingqi* and *fen* respectively replaced the Tai terms *athit* and *nathi*. Chinese expressions indicating feelings or opinions such as *shou bu liao* (cannot stand, be unable to endure), *kuanshi* (stylish) and *haowan* (fun, amusing) were also extensively used in verbal interactions among Tai Lue.

In conversation, young Dai often brought up the term *suzhi*.[9] When I asked what suzhi meant to them, they were unable to provide

me with a clear definition of the term but they explained that improving one's suzhi is part of becoming a "civilized" (Ch. *wenming*) person. A person of high suzhi is someone who has good manners, speaks softly and knows how to speak well, never argues with others, is good-hearted and willing to help others. Yet physical aspects and hygiene, together with style of dressing and consumption habits, were included in their explanation. Ai No, a 25-year-old Dai man, a primary school teacher who has shifted from the position of learning how to acquire a high suzhi to one of instructing children to achieve the same goal, emphasised how suzhi is also highly valued in the working milieu. He and his teacher colleagues are subject to the director's monitoring of their suzhi within and outside the school. Maintaining a good level of suzhi also involves keeping oneself away from immoral activities such as gambling. Yet, even when transgressing the rules of cultivating suzhi, they do this within a national frame. In long overnight sessions of games, the choice is between two of the most popular national past times: *majiang* and *dizhu* (the landlord) — the latter being a card game mimicking the victory of the peasantry over feudal lords that led to the building of New China under the Communist regime. The social grouping of this addicting past time is also national in scope, including Ai No's wife and his Han and Dai friends from the same working unit.

Yi Kaeo pointed out that she sees the cultivation of one's suzhi as developing a better society. That is why, after graduating from high school, she decided to combine productive labour with social practice. While still in Jinghong, Yi Kaeo was employed by a Han Chinese company. She worked as a tourist guide in a 'minority theme park' in Daluo, a locality in Xishuangbanna near the border with Burma. Like other tourist destinations in the area, the park was constructed to exploit the image of Xishuangbanna as a tropical paradise and homeland to colourful ethnic minority groups. Dressed up in Dai clothes, Yi Kaeo accompanied Han tourists around the park, illustrating in Chinese language the names and origins of the plants and telling curious anecdotes about the 'traditional' culture of her own nationality, the Dai, and of the Hani and Bulang. Yi Seeng, a friend of Yi Kaeo, was recruited to work in one of the casinos run by a Han Chinese businessman in Xiao Meng La in Burma, across the border from Daluo.

Both Yi Kaeo and Yi Seeng talked enthusiastically about their jobs, seeing themselves not only as part of a modern and developed nation but also as contributors to the development process. In Yi Seeng's imagery, the casino where she worked was the quintessence of

Chinese modernity and development transplanted across the border in Burma. For Yi Kaeo, working at the minority park was a way to bring development (Ch. *fazhan*) to the impoverished border areas of the country. As she put it: "the village where I worked was quite poor before the park was established. There was nothing. After we started promoting tourism, the area became increasingly developed and local people enjoyed better lives." In acquiring the consciousness of development that the post-Mao Chinese state has been striving to inculcate in its citizens since the 1980s (Yan, 2003: 494), the two girls were reaching multiple goals: improving their suzhi by separating themselves from the low farming status, relieving their own homeland from poverty, and contributing to the construction of a modern nation. Their fanciful national development ambitions even spill beyond the nation's borders in a transnational celebration of Chinese modernity.

Personal cultivation of suzhi to assist the nation's development through social practice and productive work was also coupled with Dai youth's ideological support of the nation's achievements on the international scene. Defined by Deng Xiaoping, the father of China's reforms, as "the indisputable truth" (Ch. *ying daoli*), in fact development has not only been the path chosen by the Chinese state to direct China toward global capitalism but also the necessary endeavour that should be undertaken to gain a place in the First World through a highly competitive game with the West (Yan, 2003: 496–514). It is in the nation's striving for the second goal that the emotional support of Dai youth was manifested when in October 2005 a Chinese astronaut arrived in space. "Stage set for bigger space push", the *China Daily* celebrated (Li and Jiao, 2005). The official statements trumpeted that, after America and Russia, China had also made it to space. The newspaper unveiled the future ambitions of the central government: "from space walks to docking manouevres; and from orbiting the moon to a permanent space lab" (Li and Jiao, 2005). Drawn into the nationalist vortex, Yi Oon, a 20-year-old Dai girl, proudly commented: "China has also made it to space and can now compete with the other economic and political powers." Then she added: "We are on the same level as America now", using an inclusive 'we' to indicate that she felt part of the conquest of space too. Even her grandmother, who was born under the rule of Xishuangbanna's former Tai chief, participated in this national jubilation, describing in detail the arrival in space by the motherland's astronaut to one of her friends who had missed the report on the national news.

(TRANS)NATIONAL PILGRIMAGES

It seems to be an established tenet that mobility, whether worldly or aerospace, is integral to constituting spatially de-territorialised communities in the era of high modernity. Even in highly localised ritual practices, community can emerge as part of a spatially ramified social network extending outwards by mobile villagers (High, Chapter 5). A particular form of mobility has been considered by some other authors to be pivotal in spurring imagining of communities in both national and transnational contexts: pilgrimages (Anderson, 1991). Paul Cohen (2000a), for instance, constructs the idea of a transnational Tai Lue "moral community" around religious pilgrimages of Chinese Lue from townships in southern China to a nearby Buddhist reliquary across the Lao border in Muang Sing. A particularly important role was played by the Tai Lue "saint" Khuba Bunchum, who initiated the construction of reliquaries throughout the border regions. Cohen maintains that pilgrimages to these sites transcend the rigidity of today's political boundaries, reconstituting a premodern "sacred topography" that articulated with the political topography of the former Tai principalities (P. Cohen, 2000a: 152). Yet, pilgrimages are not immune to historical changes, nor to the political agendas of the nation-states they are often assumed to bypass.

In premodern times, Mengman and Muang Sing shared the same status of *muang* (local polity) within the web of Tai principalities in the upper Mekong region. Their geographical proximity fostered the formation of a social network that was maintained through intermarriages, trade and religious ties. I estimate that approximately one out of five Dai families in Mengman town now has at least one relative who fled to Laos during the repressive campaigns of the Great Leap Forward in 1958 or later during the Cultural Revolution. Many of these live around Muang Sing and other towns in northern Laos. Nevertheless, the impression I received from comparing the current situation with the past is that the nature of contact between ethnic fellows across the border has changed since Paul Cohen made his observations. Interaction persists through visits across the border to attend weddings, funerals and rituals for worship of ancestors, as well as trade and lucrative joint ventures in rubber plantations. However, even this seems to be happening through cultivation of personal interests that cross-cut the national border, while remaining embedded in narrower nationally designed economic and ethno-religious mappings.

Likewise, cross-border religious fervour has waned, replaced by a more pragmatic credo: wealth accumulation. Khuba Bunchum's departure from the public scene might have contributed to a declining sense of transnational spirituality. In 2005, when, with friends from Mengman, I attended the annual Buddhist festival held in Muang Sing, we could only count 20 or 30 Tai Lue people from China participating in the celebration. Many of them were cross-border rice traders who had temporarily left their cargo at the borderline to take the chance to make merit by performing the triple circumambulation of the reliquary. Elders I interviewed back in Mengman said they were too old to travel to Laos. Middle-aged women from Mengman were discouraged by the high fees charged by Lao authorities and the arrogant attitude of Lao officials at the border checkpoint. Young Dai did not express any particular interest in the pilgrimage. Yi Seeng, who had made it for the first time to the reliquary, was accompanied by her Han Chinese friends. She confessed that her intention was simply to come and have fun and try out some exotic food in Laos. She did not engage in the circumambulation, because she was worried that her Chinese companions might interpret it as an expression of superstition (Ch. *mixin*). A similar situation was evident at two other events I attended on the Chinese side of the border in Mengman: a ritual at an important Buddhist reliquary said to contain fingerprints of the Buddha and an annual merit-making festival celebrated at a temple where relics of Khuba Bunchum are kept. My informants could only count four Lue from Laos at the former in 2005 and none at the latter in 2005, 2006 or 2007.

Keyes (1992: 23) maintains that Buddhist schooling "contributes to Lue being able to imagine themselves as part of a larger Tai world". Yet, this view of a transnational "Tai religious and political geography", deemed to have been re-created through the educational pilgrimages of Chinese Tai Lue monks to temples in the upper Mekong region (Davis, 2003: 182), is belied across the China-Laos border by the ongoing enforcement of state discipline and increasingly lax Buddhist teaching practices. In fact, while Tai Lue monks from China and Laos do not engage in any transborder teaching programs because these are prohibited by the Chinese authorities, only a few novices from Tai Lue villages in Laos near the border have been ordained in China. None of the young Dai in Mengman are eager to endure the novitiate hardship in what they consider a backward (Ch. *louhou*) country like Laos, where food is bad and the people are stingy. The main purpose of the four

Lao novices studying at the temples in Mengman Township in 2005 and 2006 was not so much to gain Buddhist knowledge at a temple in China — where the level of religious teaching has declined enormously since the Buddhist revival in the 1980s and the early 1990s — but to learn the Chinese language in state schools. The utilitarian purpose of improving Chinese-language competence — likely to be invaluable for the conduct of lucrative cross-border trade with China after they disrobe — was as important as the spiritual end of making merit for their parents.

An intense network of pilgrimages to Chinese national centres makes the actual social and cultural geography of Dai youth in Mengman town prevalently national in scale. Educational pilgrimages span Mengman, the junior high school in the nearby town of Mengla and as far as the teacher-training school and the technical school in the capital of the prefecture, Jinghong. In these institutions, teaching is imparted mainly in Chinese.[10] In sporadic cases, the education paths also extend to the universities in Kunming. The job-seeking trajectory of young Dai after graduation is also nationally oriented. Many girls, unable to find employment in their hometown or unwilling to engage in farming, turn to low-paid temporary jobs in malls, shops and bars in national centres, despite the exploitative treatment by their employers. Such inner mobility for educational and occupational purposes fosters a nationally territorialised web of friendships that links Mengman to Mengpeng, Mengla, Menghai and Jinghong and encompasses youth from both Dai and Han ethnic backgrounds. Nowadays, when youthful socialising culminates in marriage, it never transcends the national border. In Mengman town, I was told there were only two older Dai who had married Lao women. Among the young generation of Dai, there was not a single case of Lao cross-border marriage.

Leisure pilgrimages to urban areas of China are also enticing experiences to learn 'higher quality' (suzhi) urbanity and lifestyle. The stories of Dai youth about their metropolitan experience in Shanghai or Beijing are filled with excitement about magnificent buildings, fashionable shops and exotic food. At the top of the hierarchy of cities where the highest level of suzhi is to be found is Shanghai, defined by Dai youth as the most stylish (Ch. *zui kuanshi*) city in the country. On their return to Mengman, young Dai girls cannot help defining their hometown as a backward border place (Ch. *luohou bianjingde difang*), in contrast with the developed and modern national centres they have visited. Discussing Chinese nationalism among Han teenagers

in Dalian in north-western China, Fong (2004) proposes the concept of "filial nationalism" to solve the apparent contradiction between the youths' sense of loyalty to the motherland China and their longing to become part of a wider global community identified with wealthier Western societies. For the Han teenagers, it is the West that inspires dreams and desires for self-improvement. On the contrary, for young Dai at the margins of the country, the developed cities within China, such as Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong, are the primary points of orientation in their aspirations towards a better lifestyle and a higher personal quality. Through their nationally oriented travels, young Dai express primary loyalty to the Chinese nation and only secondarily to the wealthier outside world, seemingly adhering more strictly than their Han counterparts to the state-sponsored discourse of nationalism.

TRANSPORTING NATIONAL TROPES ACROSS BORDERS

Although premodern economic and social ties have partly been resumed through cross-border trade, the recent economic growth on the Chinese side of the border, deriving from the southern Chinese boom in rubber production, has resulted in a profound economic discrepancy between the former principalities of Muang Sing and Mengman. The far-reaching rhetoric of development from the Chinese national centre has contributed to the creation of a rupture between the "affective power" of the Tai Lue transnational community and the actual social and spatial relations that used to constitute its cohesion (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997: 7). Chinese Tai Lue have not been immune to internalising the intertwined discourse of foreign development and the Chinese domestic emphasis on constructing a material and spiritual civilisation and improving the quality of the population (Nyíri, 2006: 86). The "shared sense of oppression" that Davis (2003) attributes to Tai Lue reconnectedness across borders seems to having been replaced by a sense of unequal levels of civilisation and suzhi.

In Chinese official discourse, the hierarchy of suzhi and wenming is extended from the people within China to those beyond its boundaries in an evolutionary competition for survival between races and nations (Nyíri, 2006: 93–4). People from Anglo-American and Western European countries are ranked at the top of the hierarchy for their high degree of modernisation, development, white skin colour and low reproduction rates. At the bottom are people from developing countries, especially Africa, whose 'backward' economic and cultural

status is coupled with an idea of racial inferiority related to their dark skin colour (Nyíri, 2006: 103). In between are the Chinese people, striving to achieve their "rightful place in the world" next to the First World countries (Anagnost, 2004: 190). While it is normally assumed that China must acquire the "advanced technology and management methods of developed Western countries", it is often remarked that it can also offer its (apparently) disinterested prodigality to assist those in a disadvantaged position in the development contest (Nyíri, 2006: 94). Among others, the Burmese and Lao, who have an inferior level of suzhi compared to that of the Chinese, deserve help and civilisation.

A local expression of this rhetoric of development was clearly manifested when Yi Oi, a 22-year-old Dai girl, came to visit me in Muang Sing. The first signs of her disappointment and alienation started to emerge as we walked to the guest house from the old French market. She had imagined that Muang Sing would be similar to Mengman in terms of size, development and urbanisation because of the short distance separating the two places and because of the shared past history as Tai Lue townships. "This place is so small! There is not much to do around here! In one hour you can see all of it. And there is no chance for fun", she commented, only starting to realise that the border she had crossed in the morning was not only a line on the map but also a concrete marker of separation between different political agendas and degrees of modernisation. "This place looks so underdeveloped (Ch. *louhou*) and poor (Ch. *qiong*). There is nothing here! Look at the houses; they seem to be so rundown and old! In Mengman, the houses of us Dai are much bigger and look nicer." Her ideas of development, informed by the new Chinese urbanising model associated with tall buildings equipped with modern luxuries, was opposed to the seemingly decrepit wooden houses on stilts. The eco-tourism projects promoted by aid organisations in Laos to meet Western tourists' preferences were devalued by Yi Oi in comparison to the theme parks in China, where a commodified version of her own culture was packaged for Chinese tourists. Her perceptions about Muang Sing corresponded with the stereotypical image, widespread among the Chinese, about Lao underdevelopment and economic malaise.

The lack of development became coupled in Yi Oi's speech with a necessity for development. She was struck by the abundance of land and the copious wild forests in Muang Sing, as opposed to the scarcity of these resources in China. China's large population was contrasted with Laos' small crowds. Her reflections on the quantity of the population

soon shifted to the 'quality' of the population and the place. In her view, China was associated with cultivated, urbanised and highly humanised/civilised values, whereas Laos was uncultivated, rural and savage. Yi Oi's remarks on Laos' lack of development were projected into a general criticism of Lao people's laziness and backwardness and of the Lao government's inability to carry out good policies for its citizens. She came to the conclusion that Lao people need to develop (Ch. *kaifa*) their land to improve their lives. And the Chinese could assist them in this necessary endeavour.

Yi Oi's alienation was further expressed in the lack of cultural affinity with the people in Muang Sing, despite her parents and her grandmother having told her they had many Tai Lue friends and relatives in Laos with whom they had good and long-term relationships. Interestingly, in her speech, the Tai Lue of Muang Sing came to be automatically referred to as Lao. Her cultural bewilderment became more obvious when we went to visit a Tai Lue friend of her father. Yi Oi struggled to follow the conversation that I was having with the man in a mixture of Tai Lue and Lao. She said she could not make sense of the tones of the language and could not understand many words that were being used.

In summary, Yi Oi represents the replacement of the cross-border ethnic connectedness established in the past between her family and the Tai Lue in Muang Sing with a strong sense of Chinese national pride. It was her sense of belonging to China and not to any translational Tai Lue-ness that became significant in her encounter with the otherness of Laos. The next day, Yi Oi expressed the urge to cross the border and go back home. She could not bear being in Muang Sing anymore. She could not find anything thrilling about the place. Even the sun was stronger than in Mengman, she lamented. "That's why Lao people have such a dark skin!" The initial curiosity mixed with the excitement of an adventure beyond the border had turned into boredom only 24 hours later. Outside the market, she accepted a lift from a Han trader from Mengman. She got on the truck and travelled towards the mountains that separate her Chinese modernity from the backwardness of Laos.

BEING DAIZU: RECONCILING THE NATIONAL WITH THE TRANSNATIONAL

Yi Oi's experience in Laos suggests that for many young individuals, being Dai and Chinese is increasingly more culturally and socially

salient than being Tai Lue, in both national and transnational contexts. Like her, young Dai in Mengman normally refer to themselves in Tai Lue language as *khun tai* (Tai people) or, in Chinese, as *daizu* (Dai nationality) and, at the same time, as *zhongguoren* (Chinese people). Clifford (1983: 119) points out that ethnic identity is increasingly marked by "heteroglossia", through which "people interpret others, and themselves, in a bewildering diversity of idioms". The case of the Dai in China bears out this assertion. Daizu has become a category of "ascription and identification by the actors themselves", whereby the Dai organise their interaction with the Han and other ethnic groups in China (Barth, 1969: 10). Certainly, the state's prescriptive ethnic rhetoric is still reflected in the way young Dai in Mengman speak of themselves. For example, Yi Kaeo defined her ethnicity thus: "The daizu group is made up of three different Dai speaking groups: the water Dai, to which I belong; the dry Dai; and the flower-waisted Dai." It was just as if she had learned it by heart from a school book on minority groups. Nevertheless, such identification with the state-sponsored ethnic classification should not be equated with the passive acquiescence of a marginal subject to the centre's integrationist policies. In contemporary China, daizu, as a mode of identification, can no longer simply be considered as a label superimposed by the Chinese state. Daizu should be interpreted as the result of a contingently constructive and dynamic process of identity-making in which the Dai themselves play an active role.

The feasting-the-village-spirit (*phiban*) ritual in Shang Jinglong village in Mengman is a manifestation of the active participation of the Dai people in the construction of their identity while still subscribing to state-designed codes of ethnic classification. Banned by the Communist regime until the early 1980s as a vestige of the feudal past, the rite was rehabilitated under Deng's reforms. Tanabe (1988: 3) sees the spirit cults of premodern Sipsongpanna as an expression of the antagonistic relation between the local village communities and the "illusory community" of the premodern state. However, the ceremony which I attended in March 2005 spoke more of connection than of disconnection between the state and its citizens. It resembled more a garish public television show in full Chinese style than an intimate village celebration. For the occasion, the village members had invited a team from the Mengla County television station to immortalise their revitalisation of Dai culture in video format, thereby convincing the authorities that the plaque of "civilised village" (Ch. *wenming cunzhai*)

granted to them the year before by the Mengla government was richly deserved. In front of the state's camera, the village spirit was called upon and feasted with copious offerings.

The phiban ritual was at once a performance of identity and an invocation of state blessing. Young girls decided to display their Dai-ness by wearing the Dai traditional costume, and they enjoyed being filmed while striking poses on the verge of eroticism and romanticism. The staging of Dai-ness reproduced the visual paradigm of ethnicity created by state-promoted tourism brochures and cultural shows. Keyes (1992: 37) has described such conscious subscription to the Han majority's discursive model as a subdued act of ethnic assimilation, which is nevertheless conducive to a Tai Lue "marketable identity", whereby the ethnic subject reaps economic benefits in the tourism industry. In the phiban ritual context, perhaps there was some economic benefit to be gained. The Dai girls, despite being tamed objects of sexual desire, became the main directors of the scene. Guided by the head of the village Women's Association, they had rehearsed the dancing repertoire for days, having a say on what and how to perform. Besides seeking a marketable identity, they were also carving a niche of existence as Tai in modern China, where expression of ethnic identity is increasingly uttered through and intertwined with the state's rhetoric.

Daizu has become a social and cultural category marking the belonging of Dai youth to the Chinese nation, while also connoting a mode of belonging that encapsulates the transnational field. Such inclusion occurs through the blending of Tai cultural elements with nationally oriented cultural practices. In relation to daizu as a synthesis of these two cultural fields, I would like to shift attention back to the two wedding ceremonies described at the beginning of this chapter. The sukhwan rituals that sanctioned the marital union between Yi Kaeo and Xiao Hong, were undoubtedly clear references to the Tai cultural tradition in terms of structure (calling of the spirit, offering to the spirit, blessing, binding the spiritual essences) and content (the language used in the blessings and nature of the offerings). In this sense, Yi Kaeo can be interpreted as being situated within a Tai transnational cultural sphere. At the same time, if the rituals and their settings are examined, we notice the clear presence of Chinese cultural symbols within the Tai domain. Like the phiban ritual, the sukhwan ceremonies can be termed as Dai, a mode of doing things that epitomises what it is to be Tai in China. Confucian filial piety is merged with the Tai ritual code. The Tai blouse and skirt were designed by Yi Kaeo in a vermillion typical

of a Han bride and in accordance with the national taste. Yi Kaeo dresses up as a Tang dynasty princess for the nuptial photograph to fit herself within the national history. Likewise, the banquet menu of both weddings includes not only stereotypically Tai dishes (glutinous rice, minced pork stirred with garlic and chilli, grilled fish, rice sweets) but also Chinese-style non-glutinous rice and dishes and multi-flavoured candies and biscuits made in Guangdong.

In the wedding, we witness the simultaneous mixing and marking of boundaries. Here, the daizu category not only reflects identification with the state's cultural agenda but also expresses a relation of difference with other ethnic groups within the national context. At the second wedding held at Xiao Hong's house in the state farm, Yi Kaeo pointed out that the "the Dai and the Han were all together". Nevertheless, when the guests were invited to sit, an ethnic, gendered, and generational separation occurred. The few Dai invitees, Yi Kaeo's close relatives and friends from the village, formed four table groups: one of middle-aged men, one of middle-aged women, one of old men and women together and another of young men and girls. The overwhelming crowd of Han guests sat separately from the Dai, forming mixed-table groups of young, middle-aged and elders. One of the Dai relatives of Yi Kaeo commented that, "the Dai and the Han have different cultures and do things differently, so we Dai sit with the Dai and the Han sit with the Han." Despite Yi Kaeo and Xiao Hong's weaving through the tables to invite the guests for a toast, which simulated an act of social gluing, the group boundary remained clearly marked. However, such boundary demarcation between the Dai and the Han should not be equated with a boundary-drawing process between the Dai and the Chinese state, or between the Tai transnational community and the Han national community. Rather, it should be seen as an expression of multiple modes of belonging coexisting under the national umbrella.

GLOBAL, NATIONAL AND COMMUNAL

With China's increased participation in the global economy, conciliation with neo-liberal governance replaces resistance to Communist authoritarian policies. As the state's aspirations reach space through advanced technologies and expand on land through spectacular skyscrapers, convoluted highways and monumental dams, the Chinese national community reinforces its image outside and inside its boundaries. The opening of national borders and the economic liberalisation that has

accompanied China's modernisation have spurred debates about reconnectedness between marginalised groups within the Chinese nation and their ethnic fellows in neighbouring countries. Yet, young generations of ethnic Dai living on the borders of the country feel less connected to the people with whom they are commonly assumed to share the same ethnic background across national borders. Instead, by coupling personal improvement with social practice and adhering to state-sponsored ideas of development and consumerism, they increasingly imagine and socially include themselves within a modern and developed Chinese nation. The orientation of Dai youth to the new political and economic context of globalisation is informed more by a sense of belonging to the modern Chinese national community than it is by transnational ethnic commonality.

Resistance is a trope often adopted by social scientists to explain the reactions of the local to the global, of the subjects to state power and of the margins to the centre (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). Local community is often interpreted as a key site of this resistance. In China, resistance is also the term preferred by many Western scholars to interpret the relationship between minority ethnic communities and the state. It has been argued that the ethnic minorities have been exposed throughout Chinese history, from premodern to modern times, to an ineluctable "civilizing project" of acculturation irradiated from the centre of power out to the margins (Harrell, 1995). Ethnic minorities react to the state's hegemonic projects through open or concealed modes of resistance (Schein, 1997, 1999, 2000; Blum, 1994, 2001; Blum and Jensen, 2002). By contrast, this chapter has argued that senses of communal belonging are a result of dialogue with the Chinese state. The state's projects of national integration and economic development intersect with individual aspirations for prosperity, education and social mobility. We cannot assume that the actions of the Chinese state necessarily spur belligerent reactions by seemingly marginalised residents of the national periphery.

Giersch (2006: 3–4) has argued that frontier regions of southwestern China have been, since premodern times, a "middle ground", a place of "fluid cultural and economic exchange where acculturation and the creation of hybrid political institutions were contingent on local conditions". The post-socialist global era seems to reproduce such premodern cultural hybridity. The sense of belonging felt by Dai youth is expressed through a process of intimate cultural and social engagement with the national community. But there is also a transnational

resonance in nationally-oriented cultural practices. Daizu, once an ascriptive label by the state, has today been turned into a cultural and social field that provides a place for Tai cultural practices within the Chinese nation. Through daizu identity, ethnic agents reconcile — albeit not without tension — apparently conflicting sentiments of national and transnational belonging. The contemporary Chinese experience of nation-building and economic globalisation is creating new forms of modern communal belonging for these residents of the Tai borderlands.

10

Tai Community on the Move

Andrew Walker

In September 2006, the tanks once again rolled into the streets of Bangkok. In Thailand's first coup in 15 years, the thrice-elected government of Thaksin Shinawatra was overthrown. Once again, the Tai world of Thailand, Laos, Burma and southern China was united in non-democratic forms of government.

The military coup was justified by its defenders in various ways. Many cited Thaksin's corruption and his tax-free sale of a family-owned company to the Singapore government. Others referred to his manipulation of democratic institutions and his disregard for judicial processes and the rule of law. For some commentators, it was Thaksin's thinly veiled challenges to the authority of the Thai king that bought about his demise. And many expressed concern about the political polarisation and national disunity that accompanied his tenure. But the coup makers had to contend with the fact that Thaksin's government had been elected three times. The opposition parties had boycotted the controversial April 2006 election (which was ultimately declared invalid) because they knew they would lose. And they also expected to lose the election rescheduled for late 2006. Whatever his faults, Thaksin had a clear electoral mandate.

It was ideologically important for the coup makers to undermine the legitimacy of this electoral mandate. This was achieved by the repeated assertion that Thaksin's electoral victories were illegitimate because they were 'bought' from a poorly educated and unsophisticated electorate. This critique was directed most pointedly at the rural electorate, where Thaksin's voter base was strongest. It was alleged repeatedly

that Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais) Party engaged in widespread vote buying, paying rural voters through networks of local canvassers and securing their votes through moral obligation and, where necessary, coercion. Thaksin's local economic development policies were also widely portrayed as 'populist' handouts. 'Populist' is a word used in Thailand to refer to policies that allocate resources outside Bangkok, bypassing the usual elites. Both before and after the coup, there was repeated condemnation of Thaksin's nationwide village credit fund, which is said to have contributed to the political corruption of villagers. While Bangkok was awash with credit card debt, pro-coup social commentators vilified the provision of small-scale loans to farmers. They saw initiatives in local economic development as tantamount to vote buying.

One might have expected this concerted attack on the electoral rights of rural people to have met with stiff resistance from those who had worked so hard for rural empowerment. Yet, by and large, the resistance was muted. Why?

An important part of the answer lies in the concept of traditional Tai community that has been critically examined in this volume. Over the past two decades, the concept of community has underpinned the campaigns waged by activist academics and NGOs to defend the rights of rural people against the incursions of both the state and the capitalist market. This campaign has emphasised the moral value and social desirability of subsistence-oriented agricultural production in local village settings. It has often been asserted that agricultural production oriented primarily to household use provides a basis for cooperative village sociality, the persistence of diverse forms of local knowledge and the maintenance of various forms of local ethnic identity. This 'community culture' of subsistence production is institutionally linked to the communal management of resources.

In Thailand, the tenure of the Thaksin government witnessed the emergence of increasing activist and academic bewilderment at rural people's betrayal of the core principles of this empowerment campaign. What was particularly galling was that Thaksin's electoral heartland lay in the rural areas of north and northeast Thailand — precisely the areas where the rural empowerment campaign had been most active and which furnished many of the popular images of traditional Tai community. In casting their votes for Thaksin and his Thai Rak Thai Party, rural voters seemingly disregarded the moral force of community. Thaksin's electoral support arose mainly from the popularity of his

local economic development initiatives. Rural voters expressed a strong preference for external cash inputs into local economic development. They wanted support for investment and consumption that often had little to do with local provision for subsistence or with traditionally communal forms of resource management. They endorsed Thaksin's vision of market-oriented economic diversification. Far from resisting the incursion of the state, they embraced the direct relationship that Thaksin encouraged between state agencies and local villages, cutting out many of the provincial-level and district-level middlemen. This endorsement of state engagement at the local level even extended to widespread support for Thaksin's outrageously heavy-handed 'war on drugs', in which extrajudicial killings of alleged drug dealers proliferated throughout the country.

Thaksin ably wrong-footed the campaigners for rural empowerment, displaying a more acute understanding of rural aspirations than many of the grassroots commentators. And the wrong foot is not a good place to be when confronting a coup. Given their opposition to Thaksin's policies and their bewilderment at the electoral support these policies had generated, advocates of community rights and rural empowerment were restrained in expressing their opposition to the coup. Indeed, many had taken up the argument that Thaksin's considerable electoral support resulted from his cash handouts. From this activist perspective, Thaksin's 'populism' was the latest in a series of external influences that had undermined the moral basis of local community, orienting electors towards individualistic commercial opportunity rather than to more communitarian pursuits. It was a position uncomfortably similar to that of the coup makers themselves, who quickly moved to align themselves with the king's 'sufficiency economy' philosophy of local economic restraint.

The challenge Thaksin posed for the community rights campaigners can be nicely illustrated in relation to the issue of local resource management. For some time, the campaign for community forestry legislation had been one of the key rallying points for community rights activists in Thailand. This was probably the best example of the claim that local community-based institutions provide a strong basis for the effective management of forest, land and water resources. However, in the later years of the Thaksin's government, the campaign for community-based resource rights receded from the agenda somewhat because of activist preoccupation with condemning Thaksin's populist policies. There was an important irony in this shift. Those arguing

for community empowerment had consistently asserted that farmers are capable resource managers and that their longstanding skills in relation to land, forest and water management should be respected in national legislation. Yet when Thaksin's government allocated financial resources directly to villagers in the form of the village credit fund and various enterprise promotion schemes, the advocates of farmer capability were appalled. Communities, it seems, are fine managers of forests and other natural resources, but money is a different thing altogether. In this world view, local wisdom (*phum panya*) and modern economy just do not mix.

Activist academics and NGOs recognise the rights of local people provided they accord with the common motifs of community empowerment: subsistence orientation, communal institutions, other-worldly pursuits, and ecologically benign systems of production. There is much less emphasis on the legitimacy of those who pursue alternative livelihoods — we hear little about the local wisdom of factory workers or about the role of cash crops in supporting the education of sons and daughters. Nor is there much advocacy for the efforts of rural people to improve their livelihoods through acquisition of consumer durables. In this context, the economic policies of the Thaksin government are seen as leading rural people away from legitimate rural pursuits. In other words, rural people's endorsement of Thaksin's policies removes them from the protective umbrella of limited legitimacy accorded by the empowerment movement. It is in this sense that some of the ideological groundwork for the coup, and its rejection of the rights of rural voters, was laid by the longstanding campaigns for community rights, community culture and rural empowerment.

* * *

The 2006 Thai coup is just one striking example of the challenges involved in developing contemporary approaches to empowerment in the Tai world. In China, Laos and Burma, the challenges for local empowerment are equally apparent.

In southern China, the former Tai principality of Sipsongpanna is being demographically and physically transformed. Since the 1950s there has been a sustained influx of Han Chinese settlers, looking for new economic opportunities in this frontier region. The Han now make up about a third of the population of the prefecture. The capital, Jinghong (Chiang Rung), often features in Tai imaginings as an upper-Mekong bastion of the Tai world. But it is now, superficially at least, a

modern Chinese township, replete with the modern brand names that grace the shopping malls of Kunming, Shanghai and Hong Kong. "The Dai of Jinghong are in a *cul-de-sac*," Evans (2000b: 177) writes, "and future plans for the city will submerge them". In the rural areas outside Jinghong, the landscape is being transformed by massive investment in transport infrastructure to link — and bypass — the old Tai townships (*muang*). In a mind-boggling spate of investment, four-lane highways now bear through hillsides and span valleys on massive concrete pylons. This is a scale and pace of infrastructural transformation unprecedented in the Tai world.

In Laos, there are also large investments being made in transport corridors aimed at increasing its economic and social integration with Thailand, Vietnam and China. According to its advocates, road construction will enhance local livelihoods by increasing market outlets for local produce, reducing the costs of consumption goods and improving access to government services. Sceptics point to the potential for appropriation of local resources and the spread of new forms of exploitation, including human trafficking and sex work. Foreign investment in hydro-electricity, mining and plantation forestry is also increasing local people's exposure to resource competition, environmental transformation and new forms of market exchange. National development plans also seek to bring about economic and social transformation. These ambitious plans target poverty alleviation, identifying a swathe of districts as performing poorly against livelihood indicators and seeking to mobilise local communities to perform a wide range of development and administration functions. As district-level bureaucrats and village representatives are told to lead the fight against poverty, Laos appears to be embarking on a brave experiment with decentralisation before it has effectively centralised.

In Burma, the Tai world wears its grimmest face. Decades of conflict between armed groups and Burma's dictators have been sustained by the narcotics industry and the other illegal activities that have thrived in the lawless cauldron of the Shan State. Over the past two decades, the Burmese government has entered into ceasefire agreements with many of its former enemies but its efforts to bring 'peace' and 'development' to the Shan areas are still vigorously contested. Even though elites on both sides are happy to do business, mutual suspicion and resentment means that everyday interactions between the Burmese government and the Shan populace can be tense. Burmese garrisons in the major Shan towns seek to control the main transport routes and

the key nodes of administration and commerce. In some areas, ongoing military action against Shan armed groups deprives the populace of personal and livelihood security. And in areas of southern and central Shan State, the forced resettlement of Shan villages is justified as part of the Burmese government's anti-insurgency strategy. The dismal prospects of life in the Shan State have encouraged a flood of Shan across the border into Thailand in pursuit of sanctuary and economic opportunity. Shan workers are increasingly found undertaking the dirty, dangerous and low-paid occupations that characterises the underbelly of Thailand's continued economic growth.

As in Thailand, it would be easy to place these various developments in the Tai world within the familiar narrative framework of community decline in the face of external forces. In some cases, this may be a useful approach. The social and cultural impact of modernisation and state incorporation are diverse and there are many cases within the region where social practices and symbolic forms that are central to the constitution of community are challenged by externally imposed transformation. This may well involve the undermining or transformation of social phenomena, such as exchange labour, cooperative irrigation or communal spirit worship, that are seen as central to the constitution of traditional or authentic Tai community.

This is one possible approach, but it should not provide an overarching framework for understanding Tai transformations or for informing a language of empowerment. An important lesson from the Thaksin era in Thailand is that a defence of rights that is disconnected from livelihoods and aspirations is likely to become a liability. Simplified symbols have their place in empowerment campaigns but they need to be tested and modified via engagement with social practice. Without this engagement, symbols take on a life of their own, and their lack of fit with social practice comes to be explained in terms of a lack of morality or commitment on the part of the people the symbols are designed to assist. When activists in Thailand resort to the language of 'vote buying' to explain the political success of the Thaksin government, they are reflecting the inadequacy of their symbolic frameworks to account for the purposeful action of the Thai electorate. In this case, defending the simplified symbolic frameworks of moral community became more important than defending the electoral rights of Thai voters. Similarly, when Thai or Western scholars seek to construct a regional Tai community on the basis of cross-border commonalities in language and culture, there is a real risk of concealing the importance

of nation-state borders both in channelling aspirations for development and in providing a basis for refuge and sanctuary. And at a local level, when communities are asked to implement development programs, there is a risk that moralistic exhortations about the importance of village solidarity will overlook the extent to which livelihood security is achieved via personalised and dispersed networks of family, friends and kin.

Our concept of 'modern Tai community' represents an alternative framework for both analysis and empowerment. It points to the diverse ways in which people create new ways of belonging in contexts of social transformation. These modern modes of communal belonging are too diverse, too interesting and too challenging to be understood within a framework preoccupied with the rise and fall of traditional Tai community.

Notes

Chapter 1

1. Apart from brief fieldwork by Farrelly, this book does not refer to detailed field research in Burma. An increasing amount of research is now being undertaken in Burma but there are still very significant restrictions on research access.
2. The 1997 constitution was replaced following the military coup of September 2006.
3. When this book was in the final stages of production, I received a copy of *Imagining Communities in Thailand: Ethnographic Approaches* edited by Shigeharu Tanabe (2008a). The objective of Tanabe's edited collection is similar to that set out here. It seeks to "explore newly emerging communities and their social relations, knowledge, and interaction of powers, which can no longer be explained adequately using the traditional anthropological and sociological concept of 'community'" (Tanabe, 2008b: 1). In its exploration of "imagining" communities, Tanabe's volume seeks to emphasise creativity and reflexive agency in the formation of identity. This is contrasted with Anderson's (1991) "imagined" community, which is seen as more of a nation-state-centric enterprise. As in this volume, Tanabe's (2008b) emphasis on local creativity also reflects a discomfort with notions of community that are based on traditional values. To my reading, however, there is still a tendency in Tanabe's volume to examine modern forms of community in terms of either state control or resistance to it.
4. The discussion in this section draws on Walker (2001a).

Chapter 2

1. *Setthakit phor phiang* is usually translated as 'economic self-sufficiency', but I prefer 'economics of enough-ness', an imaginative translation for which I am indebted to my colleague, the economist Peter Warr of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University.
2. Narathipphongpraphan (2001). Prince Wan, who served as a chair of the Thai Parliament's select committee on the charge of communism being levelled at Pridi Phanomyong, one of the leaders of the 1932 revolution,

was most likely responsible for the coinage in the mid-1930s (Kasian Tejapira, personal communication, 8 June 2004). I am very grateful to Kasian for sharpening up my account of *chumchon*'s longer history.

3. The origins and etymology of *thongthin* are unclear to me. It does not appear to be in the Three Seals Law Code.
4. Father Niphot's articles are collected in a book published in 1988, *The Idea of Community Culture in Development*, which I have not been able to consult.

Chapter 3

1. For example, although the incidence of poverty in the northeast declined from 44 per cent to 22 per cent between 1976 and 1992, a period usually considered to have been an economic boom, poverty in Bangkok declined from 12 per cent to less than 1 per cent in the same period. Relative income in the northeast declined from 66 per cent of the level of incomes in the central provinces to 57 per cent in the same period, while the northeast's share of the kingdom's poor increased from 50 per cent to 58 per cent. Hence, although absolute incomes were improved in the provinces, an ever-increasing proportion of the total wealth has been captured by Bangkok (Feeny, 2003).
2. Santi Asoke is a recently established (1975) Buddhist sect which preaches strict asceticism and self-reliance for both monks and lay followers. Buddhadasa Bikkhu (1906–93), a leading reformist thinker in Thai Buddhism, attempted to reform Buddhism by translating (and interpreting) many Pali-Sanskrit texts into the vernacular and opening up inter-faith dialogue, as well as addressing the previously taboo question of whether Buddhists should support social reform.
3. Chao Anu was the king of Laos at the time. Formerly a loyal vassal of Thailand, he revolted when the Thai state attempted to integrate and impose tighter controls upon its border regions.
4. Unless, as in Wittfogel's (1957) original model of hydraulic despotism, large-scale co-ordinated labour is needed to produce food at all, for example, through irrigating otherwise arid areas, though even in this case it can be argued that the true shortage is of water.
5. Thaksin sold a controlling interest in the Shinawatra family-owned telecommunications company, Shin Corporation, to the Singapore Government, shortly after having passed laws in the Thai parliament removing restrictions on foreign ownership of telecommunications. The sale was structured to avoid taxes on the proceeds (a standard practice). The combination of foreign ownership, parliamentary corruption and tax 'evasion' created massive public outrage and inspired the series of demonstrations that eventually led to a coup.

6. *Rai* is the unit of land measurement in Thailand. One rai equals 0.16 hectare.
7. See Hewison (1989) for an examination of the continuity of capitalist dynasties in Thailand.

Chapter 4

1. 'Shan' is a Burmese term commonly applied to the Tai-speaking peoples of northern and north-eastern Burma. Its derivation and etymology is the subject of some debate but, more importantly, it is the standard international ethnonym for the group under discussion. They call themselves 'Tai', or derivatives of that word, while the Thai of Thailand generally refer to them as 'Tai Yai' (big or greater Tai).
2. Many Shan, particularly in Mae Hong Son Province, have lived in Thailand for generations and are Thai citizens. However, they are only a small proportion of the Shan living in Thailand. Most Shan in Thailand exist with little or no official recognition.
3. This chapter draws in part on a thesis written at The Australian National University's Faculty of Asian Studies. It has benefitted from time spent in the Thailand-Burma border region over the past five years and particularly in February 2003, May–June 2004, January–February 2005 and June–September 2006. A previous version of this chapter was presented at the 15th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia, Canberra, July 1 2004.
4. The designation 'Tai studies project' does not refer to any particular 'project' or activity. Rather it is a convenient way of unifying a diverse range of sources about the Tai produced in Thailand, usually in the Thai language. In Thai, the word 'project' (*khrongkan*) is a popular way of describing shared endeavours. Calling the Thai study of the Tai a 'project' is, in this context, especially appropriate.
5. Following the usage developed in Srisak and Suchit (1991: 88), this chapter uses the word 'Thai' for the Tai people of Thailand and the word 'Tai' for the Shan, Lao and other groups who are not as connected with the nation-state of Thailand. In some ways, this is an inadequate distinction but it is rigorously defended by many scholars, including Teeraparp (1994: 13). To further complicate matters, many Thai sources use the word 'Tai' (or a derivative or sound equivalent) as an ethnonym for the Shan. In those cases I have translated 'Tai' as 'Shan'.
6. The "Australian Anthropological Institute" is used to quantify the diversity of Tai peoples' settlements but as no source from that "Institute" is given, it is difficult to know precisely what publication is referred to.
7. This project statement was published in every book associated with the project. It is translated in full in Farrelly (2003: 106–10).

8. The use here of the word 'roots' (*rak ngao*) is particularly important. It conjures an image of collective descent and origin.
9. There are some exceptions to this preoccupation with the imagery of traditional village community. For example, some recent work by Wasan (2005) and Aranya (2007) locates regional Tai community in the context of the cross-border exchange of commodities and cultural products (such as music DVDs). Even in this more contemporary work, however, the classic Tai studies project assumption of cultural connection and ethnic relatedness remains.
10. *Ganto* is a Burmese word that means 'to demonstrate respect for elders' (Nongnutch and Ranoo, 1998: 326).
11. 'Lanna Thai' is one way of referring to northern Thailand.
12. Everybody I discussed this with described the cost as "very high". Some families go into considerable debt to send a son or daughter to work in Thailand. The figure is based on many discussions with Shan in the Shan State who had previously worked in Thailand. They noted that before the much publicised 'war on drugs' in Thailand in 2003, it was considerably easier to enter and stay in Thailand.
13. In 1989, Wa soldiers who had formerly fought the Burmese government as part of the Communist Party of Burma signed a ceasefire with the authorities. Over the past decade, many Wa from the northern Shan State have been moved to areas along the Thailand-Burma border. A number of United Wa State Army units have accompanied this movement. The Wa troops currently enjoy a strong working relationship with the Burmese Army and are helping to pacify and occupy strategic areas of the southern Shan State. Their presence denies operational opportunities to the Shan forces that survive along the Thailand-Burma border.

Chapter 5

1. I have outlined elsewhere how this ritual event establishes a sense of belonging to place (High, 2006b).
2. The names of places and people have been changed. This chapter draws on field research undertaken in Laos from July 2002 to October 2003 and subsequent return visits. This research was made possible by The Australian National University, the Lao Ministry of Education and the kind assistance of the residents of 'Don Khiaw'.
3. For more information on similar rituals or 'cults', see Tambiah's (1970: Chapter 15) description of the *tapuban* of northeast Thailand, Condominas's (1975: 258) description of the *phiban*, Mus (1975: 20) on territory-based stone worship in monsoon Asia, Levy on stone worship and town posts (in Strong, 1991: 263), and the analysis of the *phi pu nya* of northern

Thailand (Cohen and Wijeyewardene, 1984; Davis, 1984; Turton, 1984; Wijeyewardene, 1986).

4. Offences include extramarital sex, loitering around the shrine for no reason, gathering from the forest without asking the puta's permission, and the entry of dead human remains into the village territory.
5. *Mae* (mother) is used as a prefix for older women, whether or not they actually have children. It reflects the relationship of the speaker to the person being named. In this chapter I have used the actual prefixes by which I knew the people I am referring to, although the names have been altered.
6. The Bolaven Plateau is a highland area approximately six hours' drive from Don Khiaw. Its rich soil and cooler climate have encouraged the establishment of coffee plantations, commercial vegetable farming and cattle herding. The seasonal demand for labour is often met through recruits from the lowland farming areas.
7. In presenting his time-space diagram, Hägerstrand's interest is to demonstrate that, while people arrived and departed from a domain, the overall number of people held in a domain tended to remain static (in the case of one farm, about 30 residents). His conclusion from this is that domains demonstrate relatively little flexibility in the number of people that they can sustain, resulting in the mobility of persons. This conclusion cannot be applied to the case of Mae Kham. In her story, it emerges that domains are themselves inherently temporal and unstable. This is particularly evident in the case of the Bolaven plantation, which was no longer relevant for Mae Kham's purposes following her departure for Pakse. She says that the land was incorporated into a re-education camp. Former prisoners now cultivate the land there and Mae Kham says she has never been back. When I suggested that we visit the area together, she declined, stating that the place was now finished for her. In a similar manner, the family farm on Don Khiaw demonstrates significant variations over time. For instance, Pho Ko eventually inherited his mother's holdings, adding some land to the domain. At the time of writing, Mae Kham's inherited land was in a process of fission, as descendants of her siblings who had moved elsewhere demanded a share of the fields. Thus, domains fluctuate too, which is not adequately represented in the time-space diagrams. What is represented, however, is the movements of people between domains and over time.
8. It seems reasonable to conclude that the proportion of the population that became refugees could have been even higher in Champasak Province, the region of this research. Situated within walking distance from Thailand, the area was especially prone to incursions and out-migration in the turbulent years after 1975 and, as a result, the area was ruled along militaristic lines, possibly sparking further migrations (Evans, 1990).

Chapter 6

1. Ban Tiam (a pseudonym) is an ethnically northern Thai (*khon muang*) village of about 120 households (about 420 people) with a highly diversified economy. Roughly half the households are engaged in rice cultivation in the wet season and cash cropping in the dry season. Many villagers work as labourers or in salaried positions both within and outside the agricultural sector. There are also numerous households involved in government employment and various forms of local enterprise. I am very grateful to the residents of Ban Tiam, who have accepted my various research projects with patience, good humour and generous hospitality. I have also benefited enormously from the patient and diligent research undertaken by assistants in Thailand.
2. According to Swearer (2004: 82), this is a "[m]imetic reenactment of Sujata's offering of milk rice [that] resembles the act of first feeding signifying the image's 'birth' as the Buddha".
3. See, for example, Douglas (1973: 44) in relation to the "restricted mode" of speech, which involves "a much narrower range of syntactic alternatives and these alternatives are more rigidly organised". Douglas' key proposition (1973: 72) is that ritual typically uses a restricted code to make summary statements about the nature of the social order, to provide for "orientation and boundary" and to bring "order to experience". A similar emphasis on the simplifying force of ritual is contained in the work of Bloch (1977: 287), who distinguishes between practical and ritual communication. Ritual communication tends to make formal statements of social structure by emphasising the "dissolution of time and the depersonalisation of individuals". More recently, Rappaport (1999: 96) highlights the ability of rituals "to impose clear distinctions ... on continuous and otherwise ambiguous processes". He proposes that the social efficacy of ritual lies in its lack of profundity.
4. When the term *chumchon* is used, it usually refers to particular administrative structures such as the *phu nam chumchon* (leaders of the community), a group appointed to administer the village during a period when, for reasons of administrative reorganisation, it did not have a village headman. As a carryover from this period, the term *chumchon* may still be used to refer to the activities of the current village administrative structures. What is notable in these various uses, is how *chumchon* tends to be used in the context of administrative relations with the state, not surprising given its origins in national development discourse.
5. Here we have a modern day re-statement of Durkheim's (1915: 214–15) classic distinction between the profane time of day-to-day life when "the population is broken up into little groups who wander about independently of one another, in the various occupations" and the sacred time when the "population gathers and concentrates" for the conduct of ceremony.

6. *Tu* is the term used in northern Thailand for a Buddhist monk.
7. See, for example, Tambiah (1970), Davis (1984), Strong (1991), Gerson (2003), Sparkes (2005) and Niti (2006).
8. It is recognised that temple groups travelling long distances may find it inconvenient to bring a large money tree. They have the option of 'buying' (*bucha*) trees that have already been donated and which are stored unceremoniously behind the temple. Of course, the groups buying these already-donated trees attach their own donations to them. A simple tree could be bought for 20 baht but a more elaborate one may cost 300 baht.
9. Practical measures were taken to minimise these risks. For example, a feature of the festival was the presence of the headmen and assistant headmen from many of the villages in the sub-district.

Chapter 7

1. I lived in Laos from March 2003 till June 2005, with most of my time between August 2004 and June 2005 in Nakai. Subsequent consultancy work took me back to Nakai during December 2006 and January 2007. Research for this chapter was supported by The Australian National University, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Earth Systems Lao and, most importantly, the dormitory residents in Nakai who welcomed me. All names of people are pseudonyms.
2. The congruence between bureaucratic and party hierarchies is further evidenced by the fact that the Nakai District Governor is the District Party Secretary and all high-ranking forestry officials are party members. Also, the head of the DAFO is responsible for nominating potential party recruits from subordinates in his office, demonstrating how power in the bureaucracy coincides with power in the party. This broad correspondence means that, for the purposes of this chapter, the party and bureaucracy can be referred to collectively as the 'Lao state'.
3. Only 14 per cent of graduates from forestry training colleges in Laos between 1993 and 2002 were women (Rudebjer and Siregar, 2002).
4. A couple of men were district agricultural officials staying at the forestry dormitory because of lack of space at the old wooden agricultural dormitory (*ban phak*) behind the office. Officials at the dormitory ranged between the ages of 20 and 50 years, though people in their twenties made up more than half the numbers. About five other forestry officials lived elsewhere in Nakai. These officials were high-ranking or had relatives in Nakai with whom they could live.
5. The Lao word for 'community' (*sumson*) was never used as a descriptor by dormitory residents, probably reflecting the limited popular use of this word.

6. Jackson (2004) may overstate the absolute distinction between "Thai" and "Western" forms, as well as equating the public sphere with formal and legal and the private sphere with the informal and cultural. Yet his analysis is applicable to the political sphere in Laos, where comments on the state, particularly within the bureaucracy, are extremely limited in comparison to Western countries (Stuart-Fox, 2004). I use the term 'personal' rather than 'private' because the dormitory is not private; it is more personal and informal than the office but is still a communal shared space that is part of the state.
7. Certificates and diplomas required of forestry officials are available only at five colleges throughout Laos, the closest to Nakai being in the neighbouring province of Savannakhet (Rudebjer and Siregar, 2002). A small number of forestry officials had bachelor's degrees from the National University of Laos.
8. Older or higher-ranking men would call her *nang* meaning 'Miss' and never referred to her as *phu saw*. While the terms *nang* and *phu saw* can both refer to unmarried women, only the latter carries connotations of a potential 'girlfriend'.
9. Women officials persuaded the head of the dormitory to prepare a weekly roster that specified two or three low-ranking officials to cook each day. The roster was written and signed by the head of the dormitory and stuck up in the kitchen. It was largely ignored and was removed less than a month later.
10. This is equivalent to at least 15 years' salary.
11. For instance, food contributions for vegetables and meat at the dormitory were around US$12/month (US$0.20 per meal, two meals per day) and a one-way bus fare to the provincial capital cost US$2.20. Thus after food costs, a promissory official could not afford even a single return trip to Thakek once a month on their government salary.
12. While NT2 is not a focus of this chapter, it did influence many of the concerns of forestry officials in the Nakai dormitory. The importance of NT2 for the national economy and publicity surrounding the proposed dam, domestically and internationally, meant that NT2 touched nearly all aspects of life in Nakai. Many residents in the Nakai district centre, including government officials, were eagerly awaiting new opportunities expected to accompany the dam. In addition, the number of district officials increased over time as new staff were allocated to Nakai in anticipation of work starting on NT2. A two-month stay in Nakai after the main period of fieldwork suggested that many changes had occurred in the district centre and at the dormitory, mainly as a result of NT2.
13. DUDCP or District Upland Development and Conservation Project (see World Bank, 2003).

Chapter 8

1. *Ai* means 'older male sibling' but can refer to any close male acquaintance of superior age and social station. *Phi* is the Thai equivalent but is gender neutral.
2. Produced in the years from 1964 to 1985, they included the Piaggio Vespa Super 150, PX150, PX200, Rally 180, Rally 200, Sprint, Kosa, GS160 and the British-made Lambretta 200.
3. A Vietnamese term translating literally as 'Vietnamese sojourner'.
4. In 2009 this is set to change because the Lao group plans to tour the ethnic Lao area of northeast Thailand and are confident that they can pass Thai customs laws.
5. The rally in 2004 was held from Vientiane to the Cambodian border in the south. The rally in 2006 also began in Vientiane and finished, for the Lao group, at the Chinese border.

Chapter 9

1. The term 'Tai' in this chapter refers to the Tai-speaking people of China, Vietnam, Laos, Burma and Thailand. The term 'Dai' is the official name given by the Chinese government to the Tai living in China since the National Ethnic Classification conducted in the 1950s. The term 'Thai' refers to the citizens of Thailand.
2. *Mukhwan* literally means 'table for the spiritual essence'. It is in the form of two cones made out of banana leaves and decorated with colourful plastic flowers, each laid on a bamboo table. One represents the groom's and the other the bride's *khwan* (soul or spirit).
3. The term *Yi* is a prefix that the Tai Lue–speaking people position before the name of a woman. Male names are preceded by the prefix *Ai*.
4. In the official Chinese ethnic classification, the term 'Han' refers to one of the 56 ethnic groups of China. The Han constitute the majority of the country's population.
5. Mengman town is a cluster of two villages (Shang Jinglong and Xia Jinglong), a few government buildings and an increasing number of shops and restaurants run mainly by Han. People officially classified as Dai make up the majority of the population, despite the Han Chinese population having noticeably increased since the 1990s.
6. There are an estimated 450,000–500,000 people identifying themselves as Tai Lue in the Upper Mekong region. Approximately half of them live in China and the rest are in Laos, Burma, Thailand and Vietnam.
7. This paper was originally delivered at the Annual Conference of the Australian Anthropological Society held in Cairns in September 2006. My deepest gratitude goes to my friends and informants in Mengman

and Jinghong, whose names must be anonymous, for sharing their life experiences with me. I am grateful to Nicholas Tapp, Andrew Kipnis and Ashley Carruthers for their valuable suggestions and comments on various drafts of this article — which I may or may not have addressed to their satisfaction. Thanks are also owed to the editor of the book and my PhD supervisor, Andrew Walker, who provided me not only with careful reading of the drafts but also with encouragement and support. Roger Casas and Ai Kham Ngeun, together with a few other friends in Jinghong, offered comments on the Tai Lue etymology and helped me to render some Tai and Chinese concepts into English. Cao Nanlai provided advice on the etymology of some Chinese terms. In this chapter, I use the Chinese naming system for localities within China's territory, while I adopt the Lao name for places in Lao territory.

8. Two Tai teachers from the Mengman primary school explained that Tai girls are normally more motivated than boys in pursuing education in the state schools and are more likely to obtain a junior secondary school degree. Among young boys, the school dropout rate is higher than among girls. Until the mid-1990s, a large number of young Tai boys in Mengman followed the Tai custom of entering the temple to receive religious education while, at the same time, attending Chinese state schools. Nowadays very few of them are willing to renounce the pleasures of secular life as prescribed by the novitiate code. Young boys seem to be more inclined to stay in their home villages and help their families in farming activities for which they regard education as unnecessary. Since 2003–04 the dropout rate from the primary and secondary school in Mengman has increased among both boys and girls. This is a result of the lack of jobs in the public sector or in the service industry but the availability of alternative employment in local rubber plantations. For a more detailed account on minority education in Xishuangbanna in the mid-1990s, see Hansen (1999).
9. The equivalent of *suzhi* in Tai Lue has been identified by some Dai informants in the expression *nam hu na tsang*, which refers to someone with a high level of knowledge and corresponds to the concept of 'high suzhi'. The expression *ai dip ai daeng*, which refers to an uneducated and usually unordained male, corresponds to the idea of 'low suzhi'. I am indebted to Roger Casas for this information. All of the young Dai I talked to used the Chinese term.
10. Some young Dai I talked to in Mengman had learned the Tai modern script in primary school for only one week. Some others had studied it at the teacher-training school in Jinghong. However, most of them were unable to read and write Tai script.

Bibliography

Agrawal, Arun (2001a). "The regulatory community: Decentralisation and the environment in the van panchayats (forest councils) of Kumaon, India". *Mountain Research and Development* 21 (3): 208–11.

_____ (2001b). "State formation in community spaces? Decentralization of control over forests in the Kumaon Himalaya, India". *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60 (1): 9–40.

Alexander, Jeffrey C. (2004). "Cultural pragmatics: Social performance between ritual and strategy". *Sociological Theory* 22 (2): 527–73.

Amaladoss, Michael (n.d.). Together towards the kingdom: An emerging Asian theology. International Network of Societies for Catholic Theology. http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/INSeCT/wwide/asia-amaladoss.pdf.

Amit, Vered (2002a). "Reconceptualizing community". In *Realizing community: Concepts, social relationships and sentiments*, ed. Vered Amit. London: Routledge.

Amit, Vered, ed. (2002b). *Realizing community: Concepts, social relationships and sentiments*. London: Routledge.

Amnesty International (2000). Myanmar: Exodus from Shan State to escape forced labour. Amnesty International. http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGASA160122000?open&of=ENG-2S3.

Anagnost, Ann (2004). "The corporeal politics of quality (Suzhi)". *Public culture* 16 (2): 189–208.

Anan Ganjanapan (2001). *The issue of community: How to think about locality in terms of rights, power and resource management* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund.

Anchalee Kongrut and Associated Press (2007). "UN report says urban poor must be co-opted". *Bangkok Post*, 28 June 2007.

Anderson, Benedict (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London, New York: Verso.

Apichart Thongyou (1988). *Simplicity amidst complexity: Lessons from a Thai village*. Bangkok: Moo Ban Press.

_____ (2004). "Thai NGOs and rural development: Formation, growth, and branching out". In *The NGO way: Perspectives and experiences from Thailand*, ed. Shigetomi Shinichi *et al.* Chiba: Institute of Developing Economies, Japan External Trade Organisation.

Appadurai, Arjun (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Aranya Siriphon (2007). Border, modernity and the Tai peddlers along the Burma-Yunnan frontier. Paper presented at the International Conference on Critical Transitions in the Mekong Region, 29–31 January, in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Arensberg, Conrad M. (1961). "The community as object and as sample". *American Anthropologist* 63 (2): 241–64.

Arghiros, Daniel and Joanne Moller (2000). "Thai rural enterprise development strategies in the 1990s: A critical appraisal". *Sojourn* 15 (2): 153–83.

Armstrong, Karen (2001). *Islam: A short history*. London: Phoenix Press.

Baker, Chris and Pasuk Phongpaichit (1999). "Afterword". In *The Thai village economy in the past*, Chatthip Nartsupha. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

Bangkok Post (2006). "Eerie experience interrupts rite". *Bangkok Post*, 24 September 2006.

Barber, Martin (1979). Migrants and modernisation: A study of change in Lao society. PhD thesis, University of Hull.

Barth, Fredrik (1969). "Introduction". In *Ethnic groups and boundaries: The social organization of culture difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Bell, Peter F. (1969). *The historical determinants of underdevelopment in Thailand*. Discussion Paper. New Haven: Yale University.

Bloch, Maurice (1977). "The past and present in the present". *Man* 12: 278–92.

Blum, Susan Debra (1994). Han and the Chinese Other: The language of identity and difference in Southwest China. PhD thesis, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

_____ (2001). *Portraits of "primitives": Ordering human kinds in the Chinese nation*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

Blum, Susan Debra and Lionel M. Jensen (2002). *China off center: Mapping the margins of the Middle Kingdom*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Bowie, Katherine A. (1992). "Unravelling the myth of the subsistence economy: Textile production in nineteenth-century northern Thailand". *The Journal of Asian Studies* 51 (4): 797–823.

Bruns, Bryan, G. Lamar Robert and Chongchit Sripun Tiam-Tong (1996). Village telephones: socioeconomic impacts and implications for rural futures. Paper presented at the Sixth International Conference on Thai Studies, 14–17 October, in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Buapun Promphakping (2000). Rural transformation and gender relations in the northeast of Thailand. PhD thesis, University of Bath, United Kingdom.

Caldwell, J. Alexander (1974). *American economic aid to Thailand*. Lexington, Mass: Lexington Books.

Calhoun, Craig (1991). "Indirect relationships and imagined communities: Large-scale social integration and the transformation of everyday life". In *Social theory for a changing society*, ed. Pierre Bourdieu and James. S. Coleman. Boulder: Westview.

Castoriadis, Cornelius (1987). *The imaginary institution of society*. Cambridge: Polity.

Chairat Charoensinolan (1999). *Development discourse: Power, knowledge, truth, identity and otherness* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Center for Research and Textbook Production, Krirk University.

Chalit Chaikanchit (1999). "Pre-Angkor civilization in the Khorat Plateau: Development and settlements". In *The dry areas in Southeast Asia: Harsh or benign environment?*, ed. Fukui Hayao. Kyoto: The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University.

Chatthip Nartsupha (1984). "The ideology of holy men revolts". In *History and peasant consciousness in South East Asia*, ed. Andrew Turton and Shigeharu Tanabe. Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology. Senri Ethnological Studies, no. 13.

_____ (1991). "The 'community culture' school of thought". In *Thai constructions of knowledge*, ed. Manas Chitakasem and Andrew Turton. London: University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies.

_____ (1996). "Village economy in pre-capitalist Thailand". In *The village economy in pre-capitalist Thailand*, ed. Mason C. Hoadley and Christer Gunnarsson. Richmond: Curzon.

_____ (1997). *History of community culture and the Tai ethnene* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University.

_____ (1998). *Peasant communities: Economic theory and thought* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Khrongkan Withithat (Vision Project).

_____ (1999). *The Thai village economy in the past*. Translated by Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

_____ (2000). "Preface". In *Lak Chang: A reconstruction of Tai identities in Daikong* [in Thai], Yos Santasombat. Bangkok: Amarin.

_____ (2001a). *Community economic thought: Theoretical proposals in different social contexts* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Khrongkan Withithat (Vision Project).

_____ (2001b). "Introduction". In *Life's entreaties and Tai Neua ceremonies: Shan in Yunnan* [in Thai], Ranee Lerdleumsai. Chiang Mai: Silkworm.

Chatthip Nartsupha and Pornpilai Lertwicha (1998). *Thai village culture* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Rural Development Institute and The Village Foundation.

Clifford, James (1983). "On ethnographic authority". *Representations* 2: 118–46.

Coe, Michael D. (2003). *Angkor and the Khmer civilization*. New York: Thames & Hudson.

Cohen, Anthony (1985). *The symbolic construction of community*. London: Tavistock.

Cohen, Erik (2000). "Rehabilitative commercialization: The revival of Ban Namong weaving". In *The commercialized crafts of Thailand*, ed. Erik Cohen. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Cohen, Paul (2000a). "Lue across borders: The Muang Sing reliquary in Northern Laos". In *Where China meets Southeast Asia: Social and cultural change in the border regions*, ed. Grant Evans, Chris Hutton and Kuah Khun Eng. New York: St. Martin's Press.

_____ (2000b). "Lue ethnicity in national context: A comparative study of the Tai Lue communities in Thailand and Laos". *Journal of the Siam Society* 86 (1–2): 49–61.

_____ (2001). "Buddhism unshackled: The yuan 'holy man' tradition and the nation-state in the Tai world". *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 32 (2): 227–47.

Cohen, Paul and Gehan Wijeyewardene (1984). "Introduction". In *Mankind* 14 (4): 249–62.

Condominas, G. (1975). "*Phiban* cults in rural Laos". In *Change and persistence in Thai society: essays in honor of Lauriston Sharp*, ed. G.W. Skinner and A.T. Kirsch. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Darlington, Susan Marie (1990). Buddhism, morality and change: The local response to development in northern Thailand. PhD thesis, University of Michigan, Michigan.

Davis, Richard B. (1984). *Muang metaphysics: A study of northern Thai myth and ritual*. Bangkok: Pandora.

Davis, Sara (2003). "Premodern flows in postmodern China: Globalization and the Sipsongpanna Tais". *Modern China* 29 (2): 176–201.

Delanty, Gerard (2003). *Community*. New York: Routledge.

Delcore, Henry D. (2003). "Nongovernmental organizations and the work of memory in northern Thailand". *American Ethnologist* 30 (1): 61–84.

Diamond, Jared (2005). *Collapse: How societies choose to fail or survive*. Melbourne: Penguin Group.

Douglas, Mary (1973). *Natural symbols: Explorations in cosmology*. London: Barrie and Jenkins.

Durkheim, Émile (1915). *The elementary forms of the religious life*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Effrat, Marcia Pelly, ed. (1974). *The community: Approaches and applications*. New York and London: The Free Press.

Ekawit na Thalang (2001). *Lanna local wisdom* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Amarin.

Elson, R.E. (1997). *The end of the peasantry in Southeast Asia: A social and economic history of peasant livelihood, 1800–1990s*. London: MacMillan Press.

Embree, John F. (1950). "Thailand: A loosely structured social system". *American Anthropologist* 52: 181–93.

Engels, Frederick (1972). *The origin of the family, private property, and the state.* New York: Pathfinder Press.

Evans, Grant (1990). *Lao peasants under socialism.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

_____ (1995). *Lao peasants under socialism and post socialism.* Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

_____ (1998). *The politics of ritual and remembrance: Laos since 1975.* Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

_____ (2000a). "Tai-ization: Ethnic change in Northern Indo-China". In *Civility and savagery: Social identity in Tai states*, ed. Andrew Turton. Richmond: Curzon.

_____ (2000b). "Transformation of Jinghong, Xishuangbanna, PRC". In *Where China meets Southeast Asia: Social and cultural change in the border regions*, ed. Grant Evans, Chris Hutton and Kuah Khun Eng. New York: St. Martin's Press.

_____ (2002). *A short history of Laos: The land in between.* Chiang Mai: Silkworm.

_____ (2008). "Lao peasant studies today". In *Nouvelles recherches sur le Laos. Collection études thématiques*, ed. Yves Goudineau and Michel Lorrillard. Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient.

Evers, Hans-Dieter (1987). "Trade and state formation: Siam in the early Bangkok period". *Modern Asian Studies* 21 (4): 751–71.

Farrelly, Nicholas (2003). Focus on the Tai village: Thai interpretations of the Shan along the Thai-Burma border. BA (Hons.) thesis, Australian National University, Canberra.

Feeny, David (1989). "The decline of property rights in man in Thailand, 1800–1913". *Journal of Economic History* 49 (2): 285–96.

_____ (2003). "The political economy of regional inequality: The Northeast of Thailand 1800–2000". *Crossroads* 17 (1): 29–59.

Ferguson, James (1994). *The anti-politics machine: "Development", depoliticization, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Fong, Vanessa (2004). "Filial nationalism among Chinese teenagers with global identities". *American Ethnologist* 31 (4): 631–48.

Furnivall, J.S. (1956). *Colonial policy and practice: A comparative study of Burma and Netherlands India.* New York: New York University Press.

Gallasch, Duncan (2001). *Taking shelter under trees.* Chiang Mai: Friends Without Borders.

Gandhi, Mahatma (1962). *Village Swaraj.* Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust.

_____ (1991). *The essential writings of Mahatma Gandhi.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Ganya Lilarlai (1997). "Introduction". In *History of community culture and the Tai ethnene* [in Thai], Chatthip Nartsupha. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University.

Geertz, Clifford (1980). *Negara: The theatre state in nineteenth-century Bali*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gerson, Ruth (2003). "The ghost festival of Dan Sai, Loei Province, Thailand". In *The art of rice: spirit and sustenance in Asia*. Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History.

Giersch, Charles Patterson (2001). "'A motley throng': Social change on Southwest China's early modern frontier, 1700–1880". *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60 (1): 67–94.

_____ (2006). *Asian borderlands: The transformation of Qing China's Yunnan frontier*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Goscha, Christopher and Soren Ivarsson (2003). "Introduction". In *Contesting visions of the Lao past: Lao historiography at the crossroads*, ed. Christopher Goscha and Soren Ivarsson. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.

Government of Laos (2003). *National growth and poverty eradication strategy (NGPES)*. Vientiane: Government of Lao PDR.

_____ (2005). *Forestry Strategy to the Year 2020 (FS 2020) of the Lao PDR*. Vientiane: Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Government of Thailand (1997). Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 1997. Election Commission of Thailand. http://www.ect.go.th/english/laws/constitutioneng.html.

Gray, John (2002). "Community as place making: Ram auctions in the Scottish borderlands". In *Realizing community: Concepts, social relationships and sentiments*, ed. Vered Amit. London: Routledge.

Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson (1997). *Culture, power, place*. Durham/London: Duke University Press.

Hage, Ghassan (2005). "A not so multi-sited ethnography of a not so imagined community". *Anthropological Theory* 5 (4): 463–75.

Hägerstrand, Torsten (1978). "Survival and the arena". In *Human activity and time geography (volume 2)*, ed. Tommy Carlstein, Don Parkes and Nigel Thrift. London: Edward Arnold.

Halpern, Joel (1959). *Maison Suisse*. Joel M. Halpern Laotian Slide Collection. http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/SEAiT/subcollections/LaosAbout.html

_____ (1961a). "The Role of the Chinese in Lao society, 1959". In *Laos Project Paper No. 1*. Los Angeles: University of California.

_____ (1961b). "Observations on the social structure of the Lao elite". *Asian Survey* 1 (5): 25-32.

_____ (1964). *Government, politics and social structure in Laos: A study of tradition and innovation*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

_____ (1969). *Stores: Japanese products*. Joel M. Halpern Laotian Slide Collection. http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/SEAiT/subcollections/LaosAbout.html

Hansen, Mette Halskov (1999). *Lessons in being Chinese: Minority education and ethnic identity in Southwest China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Harrell, Stevan (1995). "Introduction". In *Cultural encounters on China's ethnic frontiers*, ed. Stevan Harrell. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.

Haughton, James (2006). *Situational analysis of human trafficking in the Lao PDR*. Vientiane: World Vision.

Hebdige, Dick (2000). "Object as image: The Italian scooter cycle". In *The consumer society reader*, ed. Martyn J. Lee. Oxford: Blackwell.

Herbert, Steve (2005). "The trapdoor of community". *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95 (4): 850–65.

Herzfeld, Michael (1997). *Cultural intimacy: Social poetics in the nation-state*. New York: Routledge.

_____ (2005). "Political optics and the occlusion of intimate knowledge". *American Anthropologist* 107 (3): 369–76.

Hewison, Kevin (1989). *Power and politics in Thailand*. Manila: Journal of Contemporary Asia Publishers.

_____ (2003). "Crafting a new social contract: Domestic capitalist responses to the challenge of neoliberalism". In *Radicalising Thailand: New political perspectives*, ed. Ji Giles Ungpakorn. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University.

Heyman, J. (1999). *States and illegal practices*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.

High, Holly (2005). Village in Laos: An ethnographic account of poverty and policy among the Mekong's flows. PhD thesis, Australian National University, Canberra.

_____ (2006a). "'Join together, work together, for the common good — solidarity': Village formation processes in the rural south of Laos". *Sojourn* 21 (1): 22–45.

_____ (2006b). "Ritualising residency: Territory cults and a sense of place in Southern Lao PDR". *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 7 (3): 251–63.

_____ (2006c). Road to nowhere? Development, 'people's participation' and the non-provision of services in Laos. Paper presented at American Anthropological Association Annual Conference, 15–19 November 2006, at San Jose, California.

Hill, Ann Maxwell (1998). *Merchants and migrants: Ethnicity and trade among Yunnanese Chinese in Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale Southeast Asia Studies.

Hindess, Barry and Paul Q. Hirst (1975). *Pre-capitalist modes of production*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Hirsch, Philip (1990). *Development dilemmas in rural Thailand*. Singapore: Oxford University Press.

Hooker, Virginia (2004). "Islamic perspectives on the new millennium". In *Islamic perspectives on the new millennium*, ed. Virginia Hooker and Amin Saikal. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Howell, Signe (2002). "Community beyond place: Adoptive families in Norway". In *Realizing community: Concepts, social relationships and sentiments*, ed. Vered Amit. London: Routledge.

Hsieh Shih-Chung (1989). Ethnic-Political Adaptation and Ethnic Change of Sipsong Panna Dai: An Ethnohistorical Analysis. PhD thesis, University of Washington, Seattle.

_____ (1995). "On the dynamics of Tai/Dai Lue ethnicity: An ethnohistorical analysis". In *Cultural encounters on China's ethnic frontiers*, ed. Stevan Harrell. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.

Ingersoll, Jasper (1966). "The priest role in central village Thailand". In *Anthropological studies in Theravada Buddhism*, ed. Manning Nash. Yale University: Southeast Asia Studies.

Ireson, Randall W. (1995). "Village irrigation in Laos: Traditional patterns of common property resource management". *Society and Natural Resources* 8 (6): 541–58.

Isager, Lotte and Soren Ivarsson (2002). "Contesting landscapes in Thailand: Tree ordination as counter-territorialization". *Critical Asian Studies* 34 (3): 395–417.

Ivarsson, Soren (2003). "Making Laos 'our' space: Thai discourses on history and race, 1900–1941". In *Contesting visions of the Lao past: Lao historiography at the crossroads*, ed. Christopher Goscha and Soren Ivarsson. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.

Izikowitz, Karl (1969). "Neighbours in Laos". In *Ethnic groups and boundaries*, ed. Fredrik Barth. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Jackson, Peter A. (2004). "The Thai regime of images". *Sojourn* 19 (2): 181–218.

Jeffrey, Leslie Ann (2002). *Sex and borders: Gender, national identity and prostitution policy in Thailand*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Ji Giles Ungpakorn (1999). *Thailand: Class struggle in an era of economic crisis*. Bangkok: Asia Monitor Resources Center & Workers' Democracy Book Club.

_____ (2003). "A Marxist history of political change in Thailand". In *Radicalising Thailand: New political perspectives*, ed. Ji Giles Ungpakorn. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University.

Johnson, Craig (2001). "State and community in rural Thailand: Village society in historical perspective". *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 2 (2): 114–34.

Joseph, Miranda (2002). *Against the romance of community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Kanchana Kaewthep (comp.) (1995). *Development for community culture* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Catholic Council of Thailand for Development.

Kasian Tejapira (2006). "Toppling Thaksin". *New Left Review* 39: 5–37.

Kemp, Jeremy (1987). *Seductive mirage: The search for the village community in Southeast Asia*. Amsterdam: Centre for Asian Studies Amsterdam.

_____ (1989). "Peasants and cities: The cultural and social image of the Thai peasant community". *Sojourn* 4 (1): 6–19.

_____ (1991). "The dialectics of village and state in modern Thailand". *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 22 (2): 312–26.

_____ (1996). "The dialectics of village and state in modern Thailand". In *The village concept in the transformation of rural Southeast Asia*, ed. Mason Hoadley and Christer Gunnarsson. Richmond: Curzon.

Kerr, Allen D. (1972). *Lao-English dictionary*. Bangkok: White Lotus.

Keyes, Charles F. (1967). *Isan: Regionalism in northeastern Thailand*. Data paper no. 6. Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program, Dept. of Asian Studies, Cornell University.

_____ (1992). "Who are the Lue? Revisited: Ethnic identity within the nations of Laos, Thailand, and China". In *A Working Paper from the Center for International Studies*. Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

_____ (1995). "Who are the Tai? Reflections on the invention of identities". In *Ethnic identity: Creation, conflict, and accommodation*, ed. Lola Romanucci-Ross and George A. De Vos. Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press.

_____ (2002a). "AAS Presidential Address: 'The Peoples of Asia': Science and politics in the classification of ethnic groups in Thailand, China, and Vietnam". *Journal of Asian Studies* 61 (4): 1163–203.

_____ (2002b). "The case of the purloined lintel: The politics of a Khmer shrine as a Thai national treasure". In *National identity and its defenders: Thailand today*, ed. Craig J. Reynolds. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

Khomnet Chetthaphatthawanit, Buntha Siphimchai and Silao Ketphrom (1996). *Khut: Taboos in Lanna* [in Thai]. Chiang Mai: Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai University.

Kipnis, Andrew (2006). "*Suzhi*: A keyword approach". *The China Quarterly* 186: 295–313.

Kitahara, Atsushi (1996). *The Thai rural community reconsidered: Historical community formation and contemporary development movements*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, Faculty of Economics, Political Economy Centre.

Koizumi, Junko (1992). "The commutation of *suai* from northeast Siam to Bangkok in the middle of the nineteenth century". *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 23 (2): 276–307.

Korolev, S. (2004). "The student dormitory in the 'period of stagnation': The erosion of regulatory processes". *Russian Politics and Law* 42 (2): 77–93.

Kulap Saipradit (1954). *The origins of the family and the human social system* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Phiphi Press.

Lalloo, Kiran (1999). "Arenas of contested citizenship: Housing policy in South Africa". *Habitat International* 23 (1): 35–47.

Leach, Edmund (1970). *Political systems of highland Burma: A study of Kachin social structure*. London: Athlone Press.

Leonard, Rebecca and Kingkorn Narintarakul Na Ayutthaya (2003). *Monitoring paper: Thailand's land titling reform*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Northern Development Foundation.

Li Jing and Jiao Xiaoyang (2005). "Stage set for bigger space push". *China Daily*, 18 October 2005.

Li, Tania Murray (1996). "Images of community: Discourse and strategy in property relations". *Development and Change* 27: 501–27.

_____ (1999). "Compromising power: development, culture, and rule in Indonesia". *Cultural Anthropology* 14 (3): 295–322.

_____ (2000). "Articulating indigenous identity in Indonesia: Resource politics and the tribal slot". *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42 (1): 149–79.

_____ (2005). "Beyond 'the state' and failed schemes". *American Anthropologist* 107 (3): 383–94.

Liepins, Ruth (2000). "New energies for an old idea: Reworking approaches to 'community' in contemporary rural studies". *Journal of Rural Studies* 16: 23–35.

MacLeod, Greg (1997). *From Mondragon to America*. Sydney, Nova Scotia: University College of Cape Breton Press.

Marks, Thomas A. (1994). *Making revolution: The insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand in structural perspective*. Bangkok: White Lotus.

Marsden, Terry and Jonathan Murdoch (1998). "Editorial: The shifting nature of rural governance and community participation". *Journal of Rural Studies* 14 (1): 1–4.

Marx, Karl (1853a). "The British rule in India". *New York Daily Tribune*, 25 June 1853.

_____ (1853b). "The future results of British rule in India". *New York Daily Tribune*, 8 August 1853.

_____ (1973). *Grundrisse: Foundations of the critique of political economy*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Masuhara, Yoshiyuki (2003). *Economic history of Lanchang Kingdom* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Matichon Book Publishing.

Mathews, Race (1999). *Jobs of our own — building a stakeholder society: Alternatives to the market and the state*. Sydney: Pluto Press.

Mayoury Ngaosyvathn and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn (1994). *Kith and kin politics: The relationship between Laos and Thailand*. Manila: Journal of Contemporary Asia Publishers.

McFarland, George Bradley (1944). *Thai-English dictionary*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Mekong Migration Network (2002). *Migration: Needs, issues and responses in the Greater Mekong Subregion. A resource book*. Hong Kong: Asian Migrant Centre.

Micevska, Maja (2005). "Telecommunications, public health, and demand for health-related information and infrastructure". *Information Technologies and International Development* 2 (3): 57–72.

Mills, Mary Beth (1993). 'We are not like our mothers': Migrants, modernity and identity in northeast Thailand. PhD thesis, Graduate Division, Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley.

_____ (1995). "Attack of the widow ghosts: Gender, death and modernity in northeast Thailand". In *Bewitching Women, Pious Men: Gender and Body Politics in Southeast Asia*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Michael G. Peletz. Berkeley: University of California Press.

_____ (1999a). "Enacting solidarity: Unions and migrant youth in Thailand". *Critique of Anthropology* 19 (2): 175–92.

_____ (1999b). "Migrant labour takes a holiday: Reworking modernity and marginality in contemporary Thailand". *Critique of Anthropology* 19 (1): 31–51.

Ministry of Interior (1962). *Community Development Bulletin* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Ministry of Interior.

_____ (1965). *Remembering foundation day of the Ministry of Interior* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Ministry of Interior.

Ministry of National Development (1964). *History and work of the Ministry of National Development* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Ministry of National Development.

Missingham, Bruce (2003). *The Assembly of the Poor in Thailand: From local struggles to national protest movement*. Bangkok: Silkworm Books.

Moerman, Michael (1965). "Ethnic identification in a complex civilization: Who are the Lue?". *American Anthropologist* 67: 1215–30.

_____ (1966). "Ban Ping's temple: The center of a 'loosely structured' society". In *Anthropological studies in Theravada Buddhism*, ed. Manning Nash. Yale University: Southeast Asia Studies.

_____ (1968). "Being Lue: Uses and abuses of ethnic identification". In *Essays on the problem of tribe*, ed. June Helm. Seattle: American Ethnological Society.

Moos, Rudolf H. and Bernice S. Moos (1976). "A typology of family social environments". *Family Process* 15 (4): 357–71.

Morris, Rosalind C. (2002). "Failures of domestication: Speculations on globality, economy, and the sex of excess in Thailand". *Differences* 13 (1): 45–76.

Mus, P. (1975). *India seen from the east: Indian and indigenous cults in Champa*. Melbourne: Monash Centre of Southeast Asian Studies.

Myrdal, Gunnar (1968). *Asian drama: An inquiry into the poverty of nations (volume 2)*. New York: Pantheon for the Twentieth Century Fund.

Narathipphongpraphan, Krommamun (2001). *Learned views of Prince Wan* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Narathipphongpraphan-Worawan Foundation.

Narimon Thepchai (1988). "Tai people and Tai language on a Tai day" [in Thai]. *Sinlapa Watthanatham* 9 (5): 58–71.

Niti Pawakapan (2006). "'Once were Burmese Shans': Reinventing ethnic identity in Northwestern Thailand". In *Centering the margins: Agency and narrative in Southeast Asian borderlands*, ed. Alexander Horstmann and Reed L. Wadley. New York: Berghahn.

Nongnutch Chandrabhai and Ranoo Wichasin (1998). "The Tai society and culture of Mai Hmok Cham Village" [in Thai]. In *Tai*, ed. Shalardchai Ramitanondh, Virada Somswasdi and Ranoo Wichasin. Chiang Mai: The Toyota Foundation and the Women's Studies Centre, Faculty of Social Science, Chiang Mai University.

Nozaki, Akira and Chris Baker (2003). *Village communities, states, and traders*. Bangkok: Thai-Japanese Seminar and Sangsan Press.

NTPC (2004). *Nam Theun 2 hydroelectric project, social development plan (SDP): Volume II*. Vientiane: Nam Theun 2 Power Company (NTPC).

Nyíri, Pál (2006). "The yellow man's burden: Chinese migrants on a civilizing mission". *The China Journal* 56 (July): 83–106.

Olaveson, Tim (2001). "Collective effervescence and communitas: Processual models of ritual and society in Emile Durkheim and Victor Turner". *Dialectical Anthropology* 26: 89–124.

Osborne, Milton (2000). *The Mekong: Turbulent past, uncertain future*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Parida Ratanaparit (2002). "The problem of crossing and getting across the border: Has the world changed or just the academic perspective?" [in Thai]. *Sangkomsat* 15 (1): 17–46.

Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker (1996). *Thailand's boom!* Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

Pattana Kitiarsa (2005). "Farang as Siamese occidentalism". In *Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series*. Singapore: National University of Singapore.

Phitthaya Wongkun (1999). *Building a new Society: Communitocracy* [in Thai]. Local Knowledge Series, No. 9. Bangkok: Khrongkan Withithat (Vision Project).

Pinkaew Laungaramsri (2002). "Crossing borders and questioning identity, culture, place and nation" [in Thai]. *Sangkomsat* 15 (1): 1–16.

Pisan Pongsawatdee (2003). "A Study of the Mae Sod and Mae Sai border towns: Observations of a theoretical nature taking into account economics and culture" [in Thai]. In *Chumchon chaidaen*. Bangkok: Sirindhorn Centre for Anthropology.

Polanyi, Karl (1944). *The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time*. New York: Farrar & Rinehart.

Poplin, Dennis E. (1979). *Communities: A survey of theories and methods of research*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.

Pratuang Narintarangkul Na Ayuthaya (1997). "Community forestry and watershed networks in northern Thailand". In *Seeing forests for trees: Environment and environmentalism in Thailand*, ed. Philip Hirsch. Chiangmai: Silkworm Books.

Prichard, David (2000). "On the edge: Regenerating a Dublin suburb". *City* 4 (1): 65–80.

Ranoo Wichasin (1998). "Summary of the Shan in Shan State" [in Thai]. In *Tai*, ed. Shalardchai Ramitanondh, Virada Somswasdi and Ranoo Wichasin. Chiang Mai: The Toyota Foundation and the Women's Studies Centre, Faculty of Social Science, Chiang Mai University.

Rappaport, Roy A. (1999). *Ritual and religion in the making of humanity*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Ratana Boonmathya (1997). Contested concepts of development in rural northeastern Thailand. PhD thesis, Washington: University of Washington.

Ratanaporn Sethakul (2000). "Community rights of the Lue in China, Laos and Thailand: A comparative study". *Tai Culture* 5 (2): 69–104.

Rehbein, Boike (2007). *Globalisation, culture and society in Laos*. London and New York: Routledge.

Reynolds, Craig J. (1994). *Thai radical discourse: The real face of Thai feudalism today*. Ithaca: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program. Reprint edition.

_____ (2000). "Tai-Land and its others: A review of *Civility and savagery: Social identity in Tai states*". *South East Asia Research* 11 (1): 113–30.

_____ (2002). "Thai identity in the age of globalization". In *National identity and its defenders: Thailand today*, ed. Craig J. Reynolds. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

Reynolds, Craig J. and Hong Lysa (1983). "Marxism in Thai historical studies". *The Journal of Asian Studies* 43(1): 77–104.

Rigg, Jonathan (1994). "Redefining the village and rural life: lessons from South East Asia". *The Geographical Journal* 160 (2): 123–34.

_____ (2005). *Living with transition in Laos: Living with change in Southeast Asia*. London: Routledge Curzon.

Rigg, Jonathan and Sakunee Nattapoolwat (2001). "Embracing the global in Thailand: Activism and pragmatism in an era of deagrarianization". *World Development* 29 (6): 945–60.

Rofel, Lisa (1999). *Other modernities: Gendered yearnings in China after socialism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rose, Nikolas (2000). "Community, citizenship, and the Third Way". *American Behavioral Scientist* 43 (9): 1395–411.

Rossetti, Florence (1997). "Rebirth of the Laotian Chinese community as peace returns to Indochina: The Chinese in Laos". *China Perspectives* 13 (September–October): 26–42.

Rudebjer, Per G. and Iskander Siregar (2002). *Trends in forestry education in Southeast Asia 1993–2002: A survey of 35 universities and colleges in six countries*. Bogor, Indonesia: Forestry Department, FAO.

Saysom Tamti (1995). *Research paper on Shan tattooing* [in Thai]. Chiang Mai: Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai University.

Schein, Louisa (1997). "Gender and internal orientalism". *Modern China* 23 (1).

_____ (1999). "Performing modernity". *Cultural Anthropology* 14 (3): 361–95.

_____ (2000). *Minority rules: The Miao and the feminine in China's cultural politics*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Seri Phongphit, ed. (1986). *Back to the roots: Village and self-reliance in a Thai context*. Bangkok: Rural Development Documentation Centre, Village Institution Promotion.

_____ (1988). *Religion in a changing Society: Buddhism, reform and the role of monks in community development in Thailand*. Hong Kong: Arena Press.

Seri Phongphit and Kevin Hewison (2001). *Village life: Culture and transition in Thailand's Northeast*. Bangkok: White Lotus Co.

Shan Human Rights Foundation (2003). *Charting the exodus from the Shan State: Patterns of Shan refugee flow into the northern Chiang Mai province of Thailand 1997–2002*. Chiang Mai: Shan Human Rights Foundation.

_____ (2007). *SHRF Monthly Report — May 2007*. Shan Human Rights Foundation. http://www.shanland.org/humanrights/monthlyreport/2007/shrf-monthly-report-may-2007.

Shan Human Rights Foundation and Shan Women's Action Network (2002). *License to rape: The Burmese military regime's use of sexual violence in the ongoing war in Shan State*. Chiang Mai: Shan Human Rights Foundation and Shan Women's Action Network.

Shigetomi, Shin'ichi (1992). "From 'loosely' to 'tightly' structured social organization: The changing aspects of cooperation and village community in rural Thailand". *The Developing Economies* 30 (2): 154–78.

_____ (1998). *Cooperation and community in rural Thailand: An organizational analysis of participatory rural development*. Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies.

Siraphon Na Thalang (2002). *The ethnic Tai in chronicles* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Ngan Dee.

Siripon Sombunburana (2003). "I cannot see the border: A Thai community on the Thai-Burma borderline" [in Thai]. In *Border communities*. Bangkok: Sirindhorn Centre for Anthropology.

Sisovath Phandannouvong, Sysongkham Mahathirath and Birgitta Danielsson (2001). *Institution building initiatives: A general description*. Vientiane: Lao-Swedish Forestry Programme and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Smith, Chris (2003). "Living at work: Management control and the dormitory labour system in China". *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* 20: 333–58.

Smith, Chris and Ngai Pun (2006). "The dormitory labour regime in China as a site for control and resistance". *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 17 (8): 1456–70.

Somboon Suksamran (1977). *Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia: The role of the Sangha in the modernization of Thailand*. London: C. Hurst.

Sompong Witayasakpan (2000). "Three decades of Tai studies and Thai studies: Comparative Tai social and cultural studies" [in Thai]. In *The situation in Thai studies: A critical survey*, ed. Chatthip Nartsupha. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

_____ (2001). *Shan history* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Thailand Research Council and Chulalongkorn University.

Sparkes, Stephen (2005). *Spirits and souls: Gender and cosmology in an Isan village in northeast Thailand*. Bangkok: White Lotus.

Srisak Williapadom and Suchit Wongthes (1991). *The Lao, the Shan and the Siamese* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Art & Culture Special Edition.

Strong, John (1991). *The legend and cult of Upagupta: Sanskrit Buddhism in north India and Southeast Asia*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Stuart-Fox, Martin (1980). "Laos: The Vietnamese connection". *Southeast Asian Affairs* 1980: 191–209.

_____ (2004). *Politics and reform in Lao People's Democratic Republic. Political Economy of Development, Working Paper No. 1*. Williamsburg: The College of William and Mary.

Suchit Wongthes (1985). "A question for the Education Ministry and/or the Thai government 'Whereabouts are there Thai?'" [in Thai]. *Sinlapa Watthanatham* 4 (4): 16–21.

Sulak Sivaraksa (1986). "Buddhism and development: Is small beautiful?". In *A Buddhist vision for renewing society*, ed. Sulak Sivaraksa and David Chappell. Bangkok: Tienwan Publishing House. Original edition, 1981.

Sumit Pitpat and Damrong Injan (2003). *The restoration of Tai Ahom language, beliefs and ceremonies in Assam state, India* [in Thai]. Bangkok: O.S. Printing House.

Suwat Kongpaen, ed. (2002). *The Tai way: A way to self-reliant communities* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Ruamtat.

Swearer, Donald K. (2004). *Becoming the Buddha: The ritual of image consecration in Thailand*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Tambiah, Stanley Jeyaraja (1970). *Buddhism and the spirit cults in northeast Thailand*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

_____ (1976). *World conqueror and world renouncer: A study of Buddhism and polity in Thailand against a historical background*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tanabe, Shigeharu (1988). "Spirits and ideological discourse: The Tai Lu guardian cults in Yunnan". *Sojourn* 3 (1): 1–25.

_____ (2008a). "Imagined and imagining communities". In *Imagining communities in Thailand: Ethnographic approaches*, ed. Shigeharu Tanabe. Chiang Mai: Mekong Press.

_____, ed. (2008b). *Imagining communities in Thailand: Ethnographic approaches*. Chiang Mai: Mekong Press.

Tanabe, Shigeharu and Charles Keyes (2002). "Introduction". In *Cultural crisis and social memory: Modernity and identity in Thailand and Laos*, ed. Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles Keyes. London: Routledge Curzon.

Tanet Charoenmuang (1994). *Thailand-Burma-Laos-China: Economic quadrangle, cultural quadrangle* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Kobfai.

Tannenbaum, Nicola (2000). "Protest, tree ordination, and the changing context of political ritual". *Ethnology* 39 (2): 109–27.

Tavivat Puntarigvivat (1994). Bhikkhu Buddhadasa's dhammic socialism in dialogue with Latin American liberation theology. PhD thesis, Temple University, Philadelphia.

Taylor, Robert H. (1987). *The state in Burma*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Teeraparp Lohitagul (1994). *The Tai in Southeast Asia* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Praphansarn.

Thongchai Winichakul (1994). *Siam mapped: A history of the geo-body of a nation*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Tilly, Charles (1974). "Do communities act?". In *The community: Approaches and applications*, ed. Marcia Pelly Effrat. New York and London: The Free Press.

Tönnies, F. (1957). *Community and society: Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. Michigan: The Michigan State University Press.

Trankell, Ing-Britt (1999). "Royal relics: Ritual and social memory in Luang Prabang". In *Laos Culture and Society*, ed. Grant Evans. Chiang Mai: Silkworm.

Turner, Victor (1969). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Chicago: Aldine Publications.

Turton, Andrew (1972). "Matrilineal descent groups and spirit cults of the Thai-Yuan in northern Thailand". *Journal of the Siam Society* 60 (2): 217–56.

_____ (1984). "People of the same spirit: Local matrikin groups and their cults". *Mankind* 14 (4): 272–85.

_____ (2000a). "Introduction to civility and savagery". In *Civility and savagery: Social identity in Tai states* ed. Andrew Turton. Richmond: Curzon.

_____, ed. (2000b). *Civility and savagery: Social identity in Tai states*. Richmond, Surrey.

Turton, Andrew and Shigeharu Tanabe (1984). *History and peasant consciousness in South East Asia*. Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology.

UNDP (2007). *Thailand Human Development Report 2007: Sufficiency economy and human development*. Bangkok: UNDP.

UNPAN (2005). *Lao People's Democratic Republic public administration country profile*. New York: United Nations Public Administration Network (UNPAN).

Uraivan Tan-Kim-Yong (1995). *Muang-fai communities are for people: Institutional strength and potentials*. Bangkok: Social Research Institute, Chulalongkorn University.

Uraivan Tan-Kim-Yong, Anan Ganjanapan, Shalardchai Ramitanondh and Sanay Yanasarn (1988). *Natural resource utilization and management in Mae Khan basin: Intermediate zone crisis*. Chiang Mai: Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University.

Vandergeest, Peter (1991). "Gifts and rights: Cautionary notes on community self-help in Thailand". *Development and Change* 22: 421–43.

_____ (1996). "Mapping nature: Territorialization of forest rights in Thailand". *Society and Natural Resources* 9: 159–75.

Vatthana Pholsena (2006). *Post-war Laos: The politics of culture, history and identity*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Vietnam News Agency (2005a). "Role of Vietnamese community in Laos studied". *Vietnam News Agency*, 5 March 2005.

_____ (2005b). "Diplomat praises contributions by overseas Vietnamese in Laos". *Vietnam News Agency*, 10 September 2005.

Walker, Andrew (1999). *The legend of the golden boat: Regulation, trade and traders in the borderlands of Laos, Thailand, Burma and China*. Richmond: Curzon Press.

_____ (2001a). "Introduction: Simplification and the ambivalence of community". *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 22 (2): 1–20.

_____ (2001b). "The 'Karen consensus', ethnic politics and resource-use legitimacy in northern Thailand". *Asian Ethnicity* 2 (2): 145–62.

_____ (2004). "Seeing farmers for the trees: Community forestry and the arborealisation of agriculture in northern Thailand". *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 45 (3): 311–24.

Wandee Santiwutamet (2002). "Shan ethnic identity construction at the Thai-Burma border: A study of Piang Luang village, Wiang Haeng District, Chiang Mai Province" [in Thai]. *Sangkomsat* 15 (1): 219–47.

Warr, Peter (2005). *Road development and poverty reduction: The case of Lao PDR. ADB Institute Discussion Paper No. 25*. Manila: Asian Development Bank Institute.

Wasan Panyagaew (2005). Moving Dai. Towards an anthropology of people 'living in place' in the borderlands of the upper Mekong. PhD thesis, Australian National University, Canberra.

Watson, James L., ed. (1997). *Golden arches east: McDonald's in East Asia*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Weber, Max (1978). *Economy and society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wijarn Parnich (2001). "Introduction" [in Thai]. In *Shan history*, by Sompong Witayasakpan. Bangkok: Thailand Research Council and Chulalongkorn University.

Wijeyewardene, Gehan (1986). *Place and emotion in Northern Thai ritual behaviour*. Bangkok, Thailand: Pandora.

Williams, Raymond (1973). *The country and the city*. London: Chatto and Windus.

Willson, Michele (1997). "Community in the abstract: A political and ethical dilemma". In *Virtual politics: Identity and community in cyberspace*, ed. David Holmes. London: Sage Publications.

Wilson, Samuel M and Leighton C. Peterson (2002). "The anthropology of online communities". *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31: 449–67.

Wittfogel, Karl A. (1957). *Oriental despotism: A comparative study of total power*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Witun Panyagul, ed. (1992). *People's chronicle* [in Thai]. Bangkok: The Committee of Rural Development NGOs.

World Bank (2003). *Lessons learned from the district upland development and conservation project, Lao PDR*. Vientiane: World Bank.

Wyatt, David K. (1984). *Thailand: A short history*. Bangkok: Trasvin Publications.

Yan, Hairong (2003). "Neoliberal governmentality and neohumanism: Organizing Suzhi/value flow through labor recruitment networks". *Cultural Anthropology* 18 (4): 493–523.

Yos Santasombat (2000). *Lak Chang: A reconstruction of Tai identity in Daikong* [in Thai]. Bangkok: Amarin.

_____ (2001). *Lak Chang: A reconstruction of Tai identity in Daikong*. Canberra: Pandanus Books, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, in conjunction with the Thai-Yunnan Project.

Yukio, Hayashi (1999). "How Thai-Lao dominance was constructed in northeast Thailand: From their neighbor's point of view". In *The dry areas in Southeast Asia: Harsh or benign environment?*, ed. Fukui Hayao. Kyoto: The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University.

ZEF (2001). *Impact assessment of a telecommunications project in rural areas of the Lao People's Democratic Republic*. Bonn, Germany: Zentrum für Entwicklungforschung (Center for Development Research).

Contributors

Antonella Diana has undertaken research in Yunnan and Laos since 1999 on a range of social and cultural issues, including ethnicity and nationalism. She is currently completing a PhD in anthropology in the College of Asia and the Pacific at The Australian National University. Her dissertation focuses on transnational socio-economic processes, ethnicity and state authority on the China-Laos frontier.

Nicholas Farrelly was a Rhodes Scholar at Balliol College, Oxford, United Kingdom, from 2005 to 2008. His doctoral research examines elite interaction in the borderlands of China, India and Burma. He currently works in the College of Asia and the Pacific at The Australian National University. Over the past five years, he has undertaken field research throughout mainland Southeast Asia on a range of political, social and environmental issues.

James Haughton is completing a PhD in the College of Asia and the Pacific at The Australian National University. His research focuses on the anthropology and political economy of development projects in Northeast Thailand and Laos. He has written several studies on the implementation of development programs in Laos and Thailand.

Holly High is a lecturer in anthropology at The University of Sydney. She has held a research interest in Laos for ten years and has published on poverty, development and rural sociality. She is currently investigating the links between conflict, state-making and perceptions of landscape.

Warren Mayes is a Visiting Fellow in the Department of Anthropology at The Australian National University and a social analyst for a major resource developer in Laos. His recent publications have appeared in *South East Asia Research* and *Sojourn*. Warren is a member of the Vientiane Scooter Club and rides a 150 Super.

Craig J. Reynolds is a historian in the College of Asia and the Pacific at The Australian National University. His current research is a study of religion, environmental knowledge, policing and banditry in Thailand's mid-south. He is the editor of a collection of essays on early Southeast Asia by the late O.W. Wolters published by Cornell University's Southeast Asia Program (2008).

Sarinda Singh is a Postdoctoral Fellow at The University of Queensland. Her research focuses on forests, wildlife and state authority in Laos. Recent publications are in *Society and Natural Resources* and *The Journal of Political Ecology*.

Andrew Walker is an anthropologist in the College of Asia and the Pacific at The Australian National University. He is currently working on rural modernisation, local politics and resource management in northern Thailand. He is author (with Tim Forsyth) of *Forest Guardians, Forest Destroyers: The Politics of Environmental Knowledge in Northern Thailand* (University of Washington Press, 2008). He is also co-editor of New Mandala, a blog on mainland Southeast Asia.

Index

actualised social forms, 167
Ad Karabao, 181
Agency for International Development (USAID), 33
agriculture
  as affected by rice banks, 49
  in Isan, 60
  small-scale loans, 215
  tax-farming, 58
  tractors' replacement of buffaloes, 50
alms-giving, 47, 60
altruism, 119, 121, 123, 135, 151
Amit, Vered, 20, 167, 197
Anan Ganjanapan, 16, 35
Apichart Thongyu, 39, 42, 52
Art and Culture, 70
Asian Development Bank, 27, 50, 69
Asian Drama (Myrdal), 34
Asian financial crisis (*1997*), 28, 30, 44
Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP), 37–38, 46, 57, 61
Assembly of the Poor, 64
assimilation, 195, 210
associative relationships, 92–93
Ayutthaya, 53–54, 56

Bamrung Bunpanya, 39
Ban Tiam
  description of, 112–16, *226n6.1*
  sense of virtue in, 122–23, 133–34
  suan huam in, 118–27, 134–35
  temple and abbot in, 127–30, 135–36
Barber, Martin, 166–67
Barth, Frederick, 180
Basic Theory of Community (Otsuka), 32
Battle of Brighton (*1964*), 169
Bhumiphol Adulyadej, King, 12, 28, 214, 216
border communities, 79
borders, 76–80, 83–86
boundary maintenance, 21–22, 180
Bowie, Katherine A., 8–9
Buddhadasa Bikhu, 57, *222n3.2*
Buddhism
  alms-giving, 47, 60
  community as moral ideal, 47
  community development in Isan and, 47
  and labour shortage, 56
  as majority in Thailand, 40
  Muang Sing annual festival, 204
  opening of Buddha's eyes, 115, 131–32
  Phra Upakhut, 113–14, 116, 130–35
  as practised by Lao dormitory residents, 153–54
  ritual of *poi luang*, 113–16
  rural development by monks, 39, 47
  temples as expression of *suan huam*, 127

buffalo banks, 47–48, 50
Building a New Society: Communitocracy-Dhammocracy (Phitthaya), 40
Bulang people, 201
bureaucrats
  anthropological perceptions of, 142
  payments for promotion of, 162
  process of advancement for, 159, 161–62
  state rhetoric vs. perspectives of, 142
Burma
  casinos in, 201–02
  field research in, 221*n1.1*
  questioning the border with Thailand, 76–78
  Shan emigrants from, 81–84
  Shan life under dictatorship, 67, 218–19
  village bureaucracy in, 34

Calhoun, Craig, 20–21
capitalist mode of production, 57, 60–63
casinos, 201–02
Catholic Council of Thailand for Development, 47
Catholicism, 40, 47
Chairat Charoensinolan, 51
Chao Anu, 54, 60, 222*n3.3*
Chatthip Nartsupha, 8, 36–40, 46, 53, 71–73, 76
Chernyshevskii, N.G., 29, 39
children of the village, 90, 96, 98–105
China
  Chinese minority in Laos, 175–76
  cultural intimacies between Tai Lue people and, 197–98, 212–13
  Cultural Revolution (*1966–1976*), 194, 203
  globalisation and ethnic minorities, 212
  Great Leap Forward (*1958*), 194, 203
  Han settlement of minority areas, 217–18
  Land Reform (*1956*), 194
  Laos as seen from, 204, 207–08
  modernisation, 211–13
  pilgrimages in, 205–06
  racial attitudes in, 206–07
  resistance of ethnic minorities in, 212
  Tai community empowerment in, 16
  Vientiane Scooter Club visit to, 178, 185, 189–90.
China Daily, 202
Chulalongkorn, King, 57
chumchon, 30–32, 92, 118, 226*n6.4*
cities
  as model for Tai Lue people, 206
  post-revolutionary era associations in, 167–68
  sociology of association formation in, 167
  the state vs. life in, 166
clans, 116–17
Cohen, Anthony, 18, 20–21, 30, 117
Cohen, Erik, 51
Cohen, Paul, 203
collective bargaining, 180
commodity consumption, 13
communes, 29, 32, 38–39
communications, 66
Communist Party of Thailand, 44–45, 59
communitas, 179, 184
community
  as an activity, 90–94

as alternative to modernity, 4, 35, 44
as alternative to state power, 15–18
as analytical concept, 4
as approach to development, 3–4, 91, 137, 214–16
Asian, 53
boundary maintenance, 21–22, 180
common portrayals of, 1
and cross-border differences, 39, 203–08
defining, 27–30
diasporas as, 91
dormitories as, 142–49, 164–65
elements of, 22–24
family and, 98–105
finance arrangements in, 65–66
Gandhi on, 36
global-local synthesis in, 14
Internet-based, 20
irrigation system maintenance, 5, 13
leadership in, 119
local resistance in, 212
as modern, 18
as moral ideal, 27, 30, 44, 46, 52, 219–20
music of, 196
NGOs role in, 15, 60–66, 91
non-family based, 146–47
as nostalgia, 17–18, 90
as political movement, 41
political use of, 4, 34, 42
pre-history of, 42
projects of the, 120
realizing through social interaction, 20–21
redefining, 63
regulatory, 11
revisionist view of, 8–14
ritualisation of sentiments of, 110–12
self-government in, 6
social relationships as, 89, 92–94
as strategic concept, 14–18
stretched-out, 20
symbolic construction of, 18–20
taxation and, 58–59
temples as expression of collective identity in, 22, 127–30
as terrible life, 35
as tool for state intervention, 90
traditional, 5–8, 52–57, 220
transnational, 15–16, 79, 224*n4.9*
community culture, 35–41
community development
accelerated, 34
counterinsurgency and, 33–34
in current times, 60–66
market transitions and, 48–52
in the premodern era, 55
under Sarit government, 32–33
self-sufficiency strategy for, 45–47, 62
under Thaksin government, 214–17
use of term *chumchon* in, 32
Community Development Bulletin, 10
community forests, 17, 19
community rights, 16–18
Comparative Research on the Cultures and Societies of Tai-Speaking Groups in Northern Thailand, Shan State of Burma and Assam State of India Project, 70
compromise, 165
corvée, 54, 56–57
counterinsurgency, 33–34
credit unions, 65
culture
border, 79–80
of brotherhood, 21
community, 35–41
Lao focus on tradition, 176–77

Dai people
  cross-border differences among, 206
  transnational community and, 21. *See also* Tai Lue people
dang derm, 74
Davis, Sara, 195–97
Deng Xiaoping, 202, 209
development
  community-based approaches to, 3–4, 91, 137, 214–16
  cross-border divergences in, 206
  market-oriented strategies for, 8
  personal prosperity vs. idealised goals for, 151–52
  as seen by Tai Lue, 202
  state role in, 11–12, 90
development monks, 47, 51
Dhamma, 40, 115
diasporas, 91
Don Khiaw, 92, 97–98, 110–11
dormitories
  as community within the state, 142–49, 164–65
  exchange networking, 162–63
  for government officials, 143–44
  labour studies of, 144
  observer participation in community of, 142–43
  revealing myths of state governance in, 149–58
  as sites of control and resistance, 149
  state weaknesses revealed in, 163. *See also* Nakai forest dormitory
Douglas, Mary, 226*n6.3*
Durkheim, Émile, 116–17, 119, 226*n6.5*

economic inequality, 64
Economic Quadrangle, 69, 79
education, 198–200, 230*n9.8*
elections, 214–16, 219
Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (Durkheim), 116–17
empowerment
  through community rights, 16–17
  economic development as, 216–17
  rural campaign for, 215
  through transnational networks, 15–16
Engels, Friedrich, 29
England, 169, 172
entrepreneurs, 50
environmentalism, 60, 64
ethnicity, 174
ethnoscapes, 196
Evers, Hans-Dieter, 53
expatriates, 177, 190

falang, 190
family
  communal resources vs. resources of the, 119
  community not based on, 146–47
  movement in space and time, 105–10
  as represented in ritual, 98–105
Fanchette, Philippe, 40
feasting of the *puta*. *See puta*
Foundation for Education and Development of Rural Areas, 51

Gandhi, Mahatma, 36–37
Ganya Lilarlai, 73
Gemeinschaft, 29–30, 93–94
Gesellschaft, 29–30, 93
Giersch, Charles Patterson, 212
globalisation, 4, 211, 213
glocalization, 14
good deeds, 162
Greater Mekong Sub-region, 69
Grundrisse (Marx), 29

Hägerstrand, Torsten, 105–06, 109, 225*n5.7*
Halpern, Joel, 162
Hani people, 201
Hebdige, Dick, 169, 172, 191
Herzen, Alexander, 37
heteroglossia, 209
hydraulic despotism, 222*n3.4*

International Monetary Fund (IMF), 44, 63
Internet-based community, 20
irrigation systems, 5, 13
Isan
  agriculture in, 60
  Buddhism and community development, 47
  Communism's failure in, 59
  community development funded by NGOs, 45
  deportation of Lao people to, 54, 60
  widow ghosts attacks, 63
Islam, 28

Jackson, Peter A., 148, 228*n7.6*
Jit Poumisak, 32
Joseph, Miranda, 90–91

Kanchana Kaewthep, 36, 40
Karen people, 39
Kaysone Phomvihane, 175
Kemp, Jeremy, 10, 29–30
Keyes, Charles F., 204, 210
Khomiakov, A. S., 39
Khuba Bunchum, 203–04
khwan, 192, 229*n9.2*
Kropotkin, Pyotr, 37
Kulap Saipradit, 31–32

labour exchange
  academic views of, 6
  labour shortage and, 12–13
  modern attempts at retention of, 60
  in the premodern era, 56
  refashioning of, 61
  unelaborated symbolism of, 19
labour shortages, 12–13, 56, 222*n3.4*
Lambretta motor scooters, 181
land redistribution, 60
land speculation, 64
Lao people, 21
Lao People's Revolutionary Party, 145, 172
Laos
  borders as viewed in, 85–86
  Chinese in, 175–76
  Chinese Tai Lue people's views of, 204, 207–08
  city life as contradiction to state's cultural goals, 166
  community-based approaches to development in, 3–4
  contemporary music, 13–14
  history and symbolism of scooters in, 169–71
  Muang Sing annual festival, 204
  poverty alleviation as state goal in, 3–4, 90–91, 151–55
  road construction in, 218
  Siamese conquest (*1828*), 54
  social equality as state goal in, 155–58
  Tai Lue in, 195
  Thai relations, 182
  traditional culture as focus in, 176–77
  traditional rural social relations in, 9
  Vietnamese community vs. Vietnamese Lao, 174

Vietnamese cultural differences with, 186–87
Vietnamese influence in, 175. *See also puta* belief; Vientiane Scooter Club
Lesotho, 111
Li, Tania Murray, 15, 165
liang puta, 98
Liberation Theology, 47
local wisdom, 7, 28, 217

Mandarin Chinese, 200
market transitions, 48–52
Marx, Karl, 37
Marxism
Asiatic Mode of Production, 37–38
and U.S. social science, 28–30
mass society, 30
micro-finance, 65
modernisation, 211–13
modernity vs. community, 4, 35, 44
modes of production
Asiatic, 37–38, 46, 57, 61
capitalist, 57, 60–63
modern era transitions in, 57–60
semi-Asiatic, 57, 60–62
money trees, 115–16, 227*n6.8*
Mongkut, King, 57
morality, 27, 30, 44, 46, 52, 219–20
Muang Sing annual festival, 204
music, 13–14, 196
Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution (Kropotkin), 37
Myrdal, Gunnar, 34

Nakai forest dormitory
Buddhism as practised in, 153–54
bureaucratic marginality of residents of, 144–45
communal living in, 145–46
gender differences in, 156–57, 228*n7.9*
higher officials' lives in, 150, 155–56, 158
internal cohesion in, 148
internal hierarchy in, 157–58
lack of casual intimate relationships within, 147, 156–57
location of, 145
as non-family based community, 146–47
observing residents of, 142–43
physical description of, 145, 146*fig*
as place for open conversation, 149, 164
project work, 160–61
promotions at, 159–60
as separate from office, 147–48
state rhetoric vs. personal goals of residents of, 150–52, 154–55
state weaknesses revealed in, 163
village poverty as viewed from, 152–54
workday at, 149–50
Nam Theun 2, 160–62, 228*n7.12*
Narimon Thepchai, 70
national identity, 4
nationalism, 182
native wisdom, 7, 28
natural economies, 9
natural resource management, 3, 5–7
natural rights, 16
Niphot Thianwihan, 39–40
Nongnutch Chandrabhai, 75
nongovernment organisations (NGOs)
community as basis for activism by, 15, 91
community today and, 60–66

and market transitions in Roi Et, 48–52
self-sufficiency and, 45–47

opening of Buddha's eyes, 115, 131–32
Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State (Engels), 29
Origins of the Family and the Human Social System (Kulap), 32
Otsuka, Hisao, 32

Pak Mun Dam, 64
Pali language, 192
Parida Ratanaparit, 77–78
Pathet Lao, 167
patronage, 159–60
per diems, 160
phanakngan, 157–58
phi kon, 113–14, 116
Phittaya Wongkun, 40–41
Piaggio Vespa, 168–71
pilgrimages, 203–06
Pisan Pongsawatdee, 78–79
poi luang
conflict around organisation of, 125–27, 135
external orientation of, 131–32, 136–37
financing of, 125
logistics for, 124–25
ritual of, 113–16
suan huam symbolism and, 121–27, 134–35
Upakhut's role in, 130–35
Polanyi, Karl, 52–53
political incorrectness, 189
polygamy, 56–57
Poplin, Dennis, 30
poverty
decline in Thailand of, 222*n3.1*
in Laos, 3–4, 90–91, 152–54
state power and campaigns against, 111
Prawet Wasi, 39
Pridi Phanomyong, 221*n2.2*
Project on Tai Social and Cultural History, 8, 71–72
project work, 160–61
promissory officials, 157–58
puta
care for, 98–99
description of, 89–90
family representation in ritual, 98–105
nature of the, 97–98
performing the ritual, 94–97
as ritualising communal sentiments, 91, 110–12
space-time and, 105–10. *See also* Laos
putonghua, 200

Rama IV, King, 57
Rama V, King, 57
Ranoo Wichasin, 74–75
The Real Face of Thai Feudalism Today (Jit), 32
Realizing Community (Amit *et al.*), 20
Redd Barna (Norway), 45
Redfield, Robert, 29
refugees, 195, 203, 219, 225*n5.8*
regime of images, 148
Rehbein, Boike, 13–14
remittances, 66
resistance, 212
resource conflicts, 60
rice, 115, 123–24, 192–93
rice banks, 47–49, 52
rituals
of belonging, 90
of communal sentiments, 110–12

communication in, 226*n6.3*
external orientation of, 131–32, 136–37
opening of Buddha's eyes, 115, 131–32
performing *puta*, 94–97
phiban, 209–10
pilgrimages, 203–06
poi luang, 113–16, 121–27
pragmatics of performance of, 136
rice as used in, 115, 123–24, 192–93
of the Shan, 75
simplification of symbols in, 116–18, 135
spirit-binding, 192–93
women's roles in, 210
Roi Et province, 45, 48–52, 65
royal family of Thailand: sufficiency economy promoted by, 62
rural development. *See* community development

sacrifice, 119
Santi Asoke movement, 47, 222*n3.2*
Sarit Thanarat, Field Marshal, 32–33
Save the Children (Norway), 45
savings groups, 65
Saysom Tamti, 73
self-provisioning, 9
self-sufficiency, 45–47, 62
semi-Asiatic mode of production, 57, 60–62
Shan National Army, 80
Shan people
border as viewed by, 83–84
Burmese-Thai differences among, 39
as citizens of Thailand, 223*n4.2*
ethnic awareness among, 80
migration to Thailand of, 67, 81–84, 219
as part of regional Tai community, 78–80
revolt in Burma of, 67
seen as communal, 39, 68–69, 74–75
as transnational community, 21, 67
under military dictatorship, 67, 218–219
Shan village communities
authentic community, 72–74
change and continuity in, 75–76
as cooperative, 39, 68–69, 74–75
as ecologically benign, 74
forced resettlement of, 219
and legitimacy of Thai–Burmese border, 76–78
Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation (Thongchai), 77
Singapore, 214
Sipsongpanna, 194, 217
Sirikit, Queen, 51
slavery, 54, 56–57
Sompong Witayasakpan, 71–75, 78
Souphanouvong, Prince, 176
Southeast Asia map, 2
space-time, 105–10
spirit-binding, 192–93
spirit cults, 6
spirit possession, 63
spiritual practices
changes in, 7
spirit cults, 6
tutelary spirits, 130–31
the state
community as alternative to, 15–18
community as tool for intervention by, 90
community creation role of, 10–12
community creation within, 141–42

development and role of, 11–12, 90
dormitories as community within, 142–49, 164–65
myths of governance, 149–58
poverty alleviation as goal in Laos of, 151–55
power of, 111
urban life vs., 166
structure of feeling, 196
Strukov, D. N., 39
suan huam, 118–27, 134–35
suan tua, 119
subsistence production, 5–6, 37–38, 60
Suchit Wongthes, 70
sufficiency economy, 12, 28, 62, 216
sukhwan, 192, 210
sumson, 92
surplus extraction, 53–55
suzhi, 198–202, 205, 230*n9.9*
symbolism, unelaborated, 18–19, 219

Tai community. *See* community
The Tai in Southeast Asia (Teeraparp), 69
Tai Lue people
Chinese pilgrimages of, 205–06
community empowerment, 16
cross-border divergences in development, 206
cross-border movement by, 195–97, 203–05
cultural characteristics of, 195
cultural intimacies between China and, 197–98, 212–13
development as seen by, 202
ethnic identity as marketable, 210
Laos as viewed by, 204
reconciling national and transnational, 208–11
suzhi as path of, 199–202, 205
urban world as models for, 206
wedding ceremonies, 192–94, 210. *See also* Dai people
Tai peoples, 1, 3
Tai Studies Project, 69–72, 80, 85
Taksin, King, 56
Tanabe, Shigeharu, 209, 221*n1.3*
Tanet Charoenmuang, 79–80
taxation, 58–59
Teeraparp Lohitagul, 69–70, 72, 75
temples, 22, 127–30
territorialisation, 8
Thai Airways, 50
Thai Motor Scooter Rider Group, 181
Thai people: transnational community and, 21
Thai Rak Thai Party, 62–64, 215
The Thai Village Economy in the Past (Chatthip), 37–38
Thailand
Asian financial crisis (*1997*), 28, 30, 44
Buddhism as majority religion in, 40
community culture in, 35–41
community development, 32–34
community forest legislation, 17
coup of *2006*, 214–17
Lao relations, 182
poverty's decline in, 222*n3.1*
premodern political economy of, 52–57
questioning the border with Burma, 76–78
Shan migration to, 67, 81–84, 219
Shan people in, 39, 80–84, 223*n4.2*
Tai Lue in, 195
U.S. development assistance to, 32–33
village bureaucracy in, 34

village self-sufficiency strategy, 45–47, 62
Thaksin Shinawatra, 62, 183, 214–17, 222*n3.5*
theft, 133
Thepkavi, Phra, 51
Thianchai Wongchaisuwan, 40
time-depth, 105
Tokei, Ferenc, 38
Tönnies, Ferdinand, 29, 93–94
totems, 116–17
tragedy of the pre-commons, 64
transparent moments, 142, 149
Turner, J. Sheldon, 33
tutelary spirits, 130–31

ummah, 28
United Kingdom, 169, 172
United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), 36
United States
Agency for International Development (USAID), 33
development assistance to Thailand from, 32–33
social science and Marxism, 28–30
United States Operation Mission (USOM), 33
Upakhut, Phra, 113–14, 116, 130–35
urban associations, 167–68
use rights, 16

Vergemeinschaftung relationships, 89, 92–94
Vergesellschaftung relationships, 92–93
Vespa scooters, 168–71
Vientiane Scooter Club
buying and selling of Vespas in, 171
China visit, 178, 185, 189–90
communitas as experienced during expeditions, 179
emergence of, 167
expatriates members of, 177, 190
intergenerational character of, 171
Lao-Thai dialogue, 180–84
as male-dominated organisation, 171–72
mechanics' role in, 173
members as explorers, 179, 185, 191
scooter rallies, 177–80
Second Lao-Thai Scooter Rally (*2006*), 177–78
Thai groups' shared activities with, 168, 172
transnational identity shared by members of, 14
Vietnam rally, 184–89
Vietnamese-Lao members, 167–68, 173–76, 186, 190–91
viet kieu, 187
Vietnam
bike accident in, 187–89
Lao cultural differences with, 186–87
as source of Vespas and parts, 185–86
Thai scooter groups in, 185, 190
volunteers, 157–58
vote buying, 214–16, 219

Wa people, 224*n4.13*
war on drugs, 216
Wan, Prince, 31, 92, 221*n2.2*
Wandee Santiwutamet, 80
Wasan Panyagaew, 196
Weber, Max, 89, 92–93, 98
wedding ceremonies, 192–94, 210
Westerners, 190

widow ghosts, 63
women
  as community leaders, 119
  in dormitories, 156–57, 228*n7.9*
  education of Tai Lue, 200, 230*n9.8*
  as entrepreneurs, 50
  mobility of, 61
  in the premodern era, 56
  ritual roles of, 210
  savings groups, 65
  in Vientiane Scooter Club, 171
World Bank, 27, 37, 63, 161
World Decade of Cultural Development, 36

Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, 194, 217–18

Yos Santasombat, 74

HAWAI'I

Studies of the Tai world often treat 'state' and 'community' as polar opposites: the state produces administrative uniformity and commercialization while community sustains tradition, local knowledge and subsistence economy. This assumption leads to the conclusion that the traditional community is undermined by the modern forces of state incorporation and market penetration. States rule and communities resist.

Tai Lands and Thailand takes a very different view. Using thematic and ethnographic studies from Thailand, Laos, Burma and southern China, the authors describe modern forms of community where state power intersects with markets, livelihoods and aspirations. Modern community is not easily created nor is it inevitable, but rapid social and economic change in the Tai world has provided many opportunities for new forms of communal belonging to emerge.

Tai Lands and Thailand opens up fresh perspectives on a region in transition, and the discussion promises to inform future studies of contemporary sociality in Southeast Asia.

Andrew Walker is a Senior Fellow in The Australian National University's Resource Management in Asia-Pacific Program.

University of Hawai'i Press